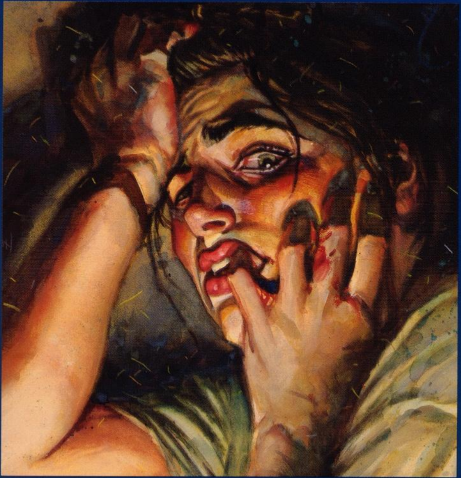
FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF **IMAJICA**

CLIVE BARKER



DREAD

Adapted by
FRED BURKE

Illustrated by
DAN BRERETON

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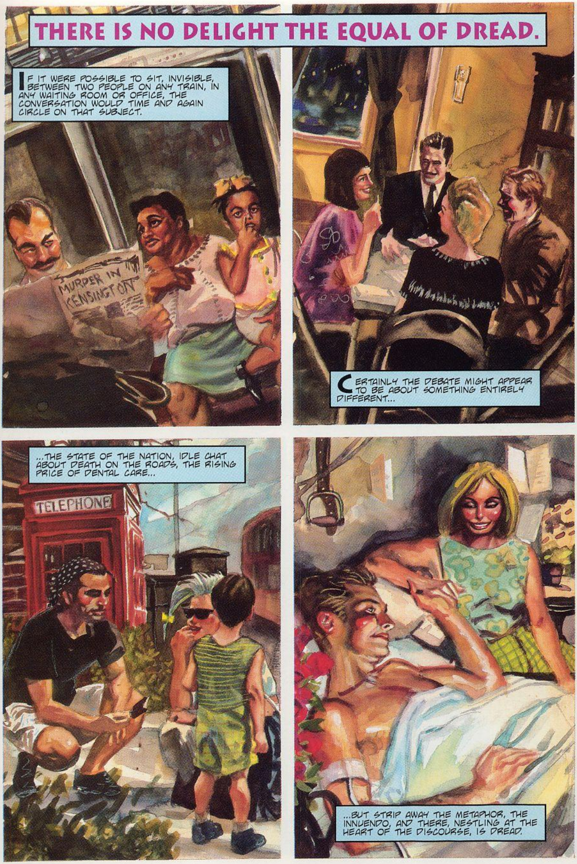
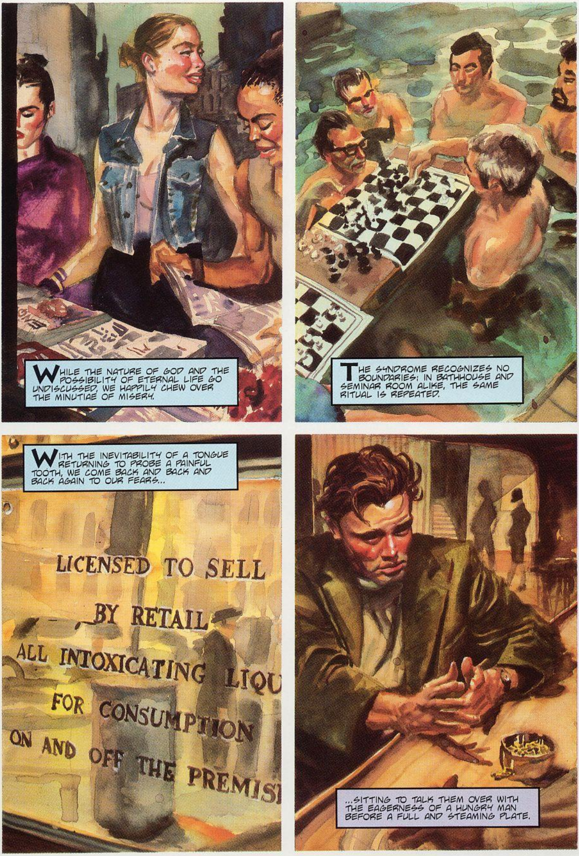
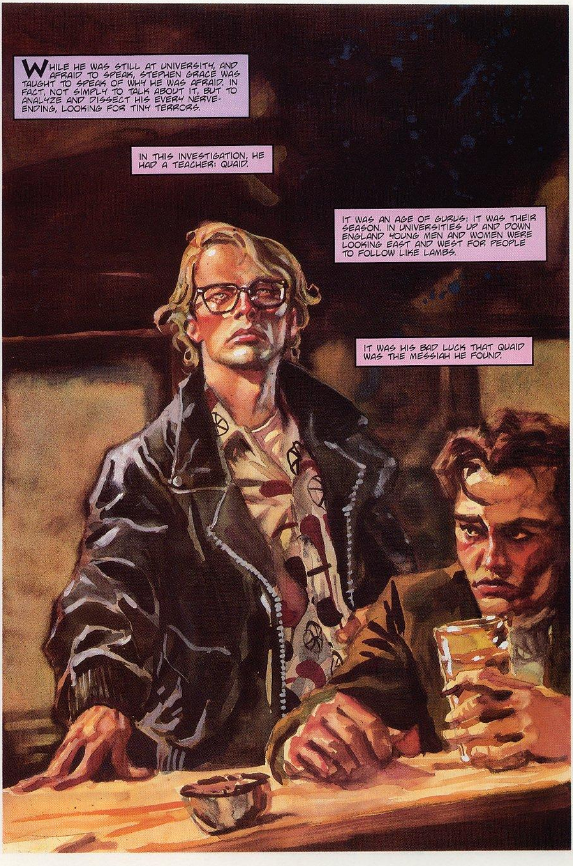
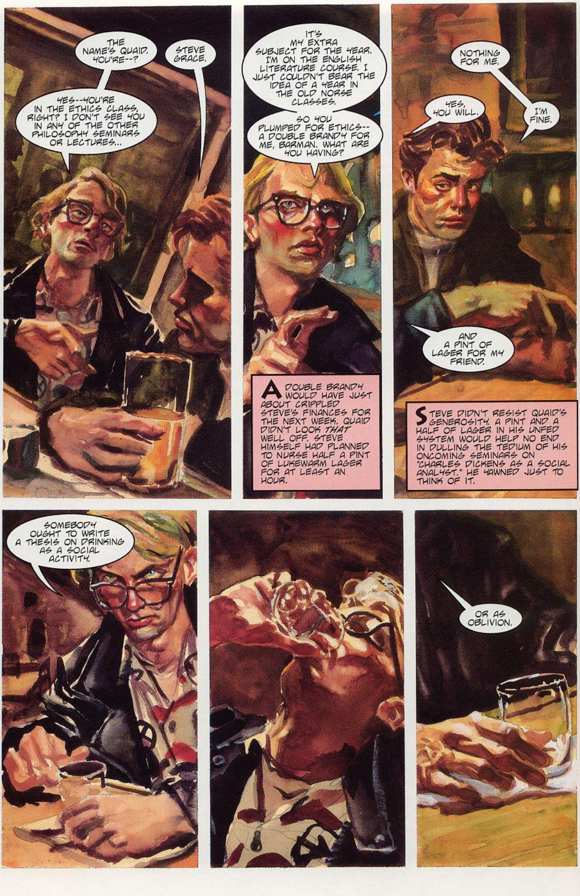
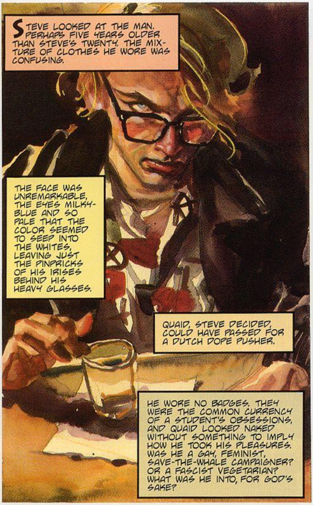
THE ARTIST WOULD LIKE TO THANK HIS MODELS—MICHELE BRERETON, BRETT RECTOR, AND CASEY FOSTER (THE QUINTESSENTIAL QUAID)—WITHOUT WHOM THIS BOOK COULD NOT HAVE BEEN COMPLETED.

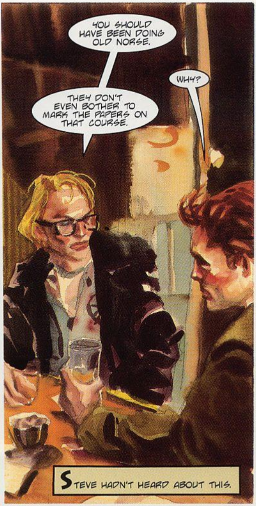

THERE IS NO DELIGHT THE EQUAL OF DREAD.
IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO SIT, INVISIBLE, BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE ON ANY TRAIN, IN ANY WAITING ROOM OR OFFICE, THE CONVERSATION WOULD TIME AND AGAIN CIRCLE ON THAT SUBJECT.
MURDER IN KENSINGTON
CERTAINLY THE DEBATE MIGHT APPEAR TO BE ABOUT SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT...
...THE STATE OF THE NATION, IDLE CHAT ABOUT DEATH ON THE ROADS, THE RISING PRICE OF DENTAL CARE...
TELEPHONE
...BUT STRIP AWAY THE METAPHOR, THE INNUENDO, AND THERE, NESTLING AT THE HEART OF THE DISCOURSE, IS DREAD.

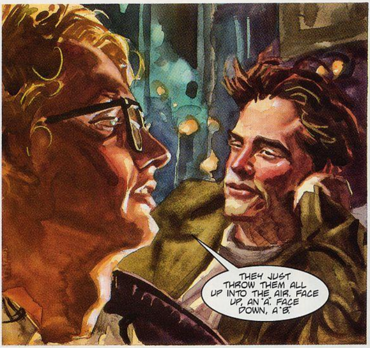

WHILE THE NATURE OF GOD AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ETERNAL LIFE GO UNDISCUSSED, WE HAPPILY CHEW OVER THE MINUTIAE OF MISERY.
THE SYNDROME RECOGNIZES NO BOUNDARIES; IN BATHHOUSE AND SEMINAR ROOM ALIKE, THE SAME RITUAL IS REPEATED.
WITH THE INEVITABILITY OF A TONGUE RETURNING TO PROBE A PAINFUL TOOTH, WE COME BACK AND BACK AND BACK AGAIN TO OUR FEARS...
LICENSED TO SELL
BY RETAIL
ALL INTOXICATING LIQU
FOR CONSUMPTION
ON AND OFF THE PREMISI
...SITTING TO TALK THEM OVER WITH THE EAGERNESS OF A HUNGRY MAN BEFORE A FULL AND STEAMING PLATE.

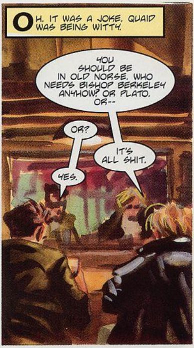

WHILE HE WAS STILL AT UNIVERSITY, AND AFRAID TO SPEAK, STEPHEN GRACE WAS TAUGHT TO SPEAK OF WHY HE WAS AFRAID. IN FACT, NOT SIMPLY TO TALK ABOUT IT, BUT TO ANALYZE AND DISSECT HIS EVERY NERVE-ENDING, LOOKING FOR TINY TERRORS.
IN THIS INVESTIGATION, HE HAD A TEACHER: QUAID.
IT WAS AN AGE OF GURUS; IT WAS THEIR SEASON. IN UNIVERSITIES UP AND DOWN ENGLAND YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN WERE LOOKING EAST AND WEST FOR PEOPLE TO FOLLOW LIKE LAMBS.
IT WAS HIS BAD LUCK THAT QUAID WAS THE MESSIAH HE FOUND.

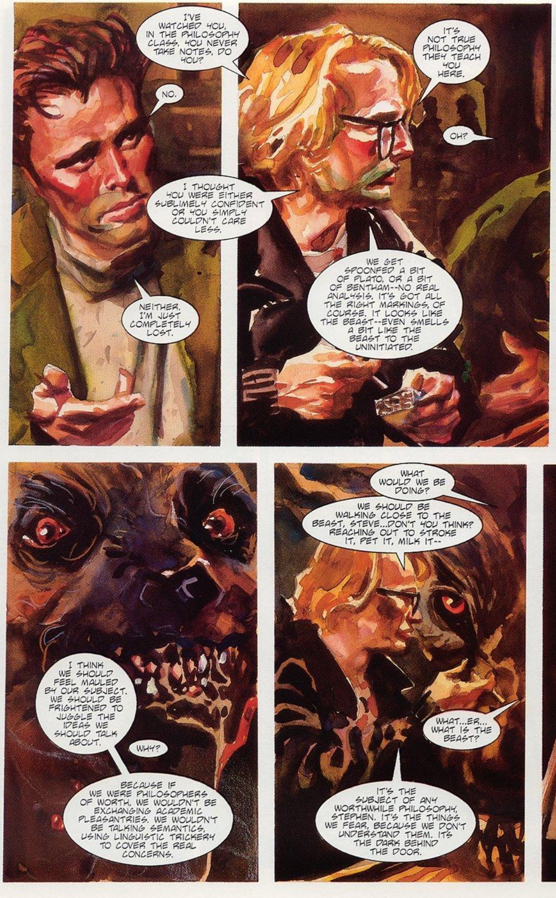

THE NAME'S QUAID. YOU'RE--?
STEVE GRACE.
YES--YOU'RE IN THE ETHICS CLASS, RIGHT? I DON'T SEE YOU IN ANY OF THE OTHER PHILOSOPHY SEMINARS OR LECTURES...
IT'S MY EXTRA SUBJECT FOR THE YEAR. I'M ON THE ENGLISH LITERATURE COURSE. I JUST COULDN'T BEAR THE IDEA OF A YEAR IN THE OLD NORSE CLASSES.
SO YOU PLUMPED FOR ETHICS-- A DOUBLE BRANDY FOR ME, BARMAN. WHAT ARE YOU HAVING?
A DOUBLE BRANDY WOULD HAVE JUST ABOUT CRIPPLED STEVE'S FINANCES FOR THE NEXT WEEK. QUAID DIDN'T LOOK *THAT* WELL OFF. STEVE HIMSELF HAD PLANNED TO NURSE HALF A PINT OF LUKEWARM LAGER FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR.
NOTHING FOR ME.
YES, YOU WILL.
I'M FINE.
AND A PINT OF LAGER FOR MY FRIEND.
STEVE DIDN'T RESIST QUAID'S GENEROSITY. A PINT AND A HALF OF LAGER IN HIS UNFED SYSTEM WOULD HELP NO END IN DULLING THE TEDIUM OF HIS ONCOMING SEMINARS ON "CHARLES DICKENS AS A SOCIAL ANALYST." HE YAWNED JUST TO THINK OF IT.
SOMEBODY OUGHT TO WRITE A THESIS ON DRINKING AS A SOCIAL ACTIVITY.
OR AS OBLIVION.

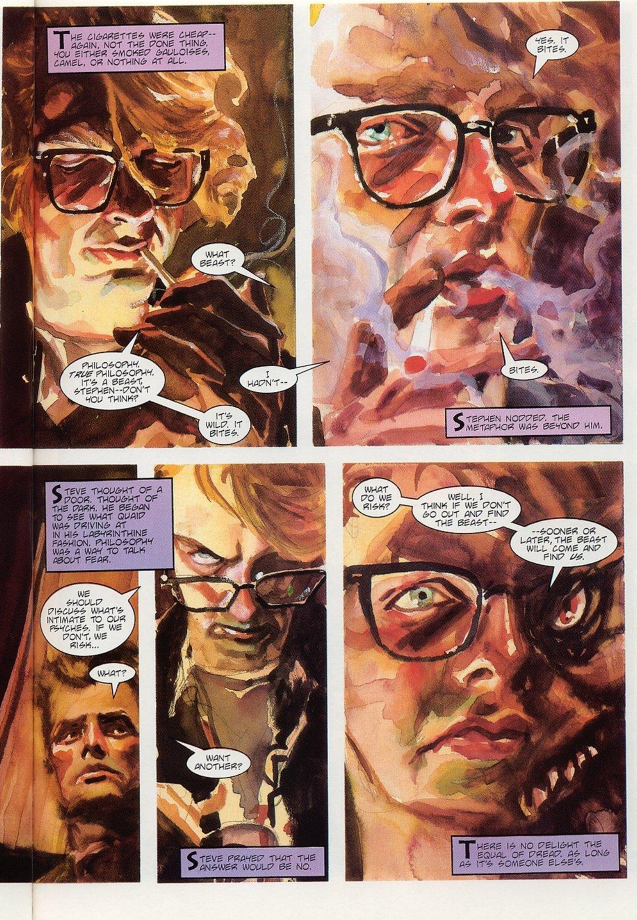

STEVE LOOKED AT THE MAN. PERHAPS FIVE YEARS OLDER THAN STEVE'S TWENTY. THE MIXTURE OF CLOTHES HE WORE WAS CONFUSING.
THE FACE WAS UNREMARKABLE, THE EYES MILKY-BLUE AND SO PALE THAT THE COLOR SEEMED TO SEEP INTO THE WHITES, LEAVING JUST THE PINPRICKS OF HIS IRISES BEHIND HIS HEAVY GLASSES.
QUAID, STEVE DECIDED, COULD HAVE PASSED FOR A DUTCH DOPE PUSHER.
HE WORE NO BADGES. THEY WERE THE COMMON CURRENCY OF A STUDENT'S OBSESSIONS, AND QUAID LOOKED NAKED WITHOUT SOMETHING TO IMPLY HOW HE TOOK HIS PLEASURES. WAS HE A GAY, FEMINIST, SAVE-THE-WHALE CAMPAIGNER? OR A FASCIST VEGETARIAN? WHAT WAS HE INTO, FOR GOD'S SAKE?

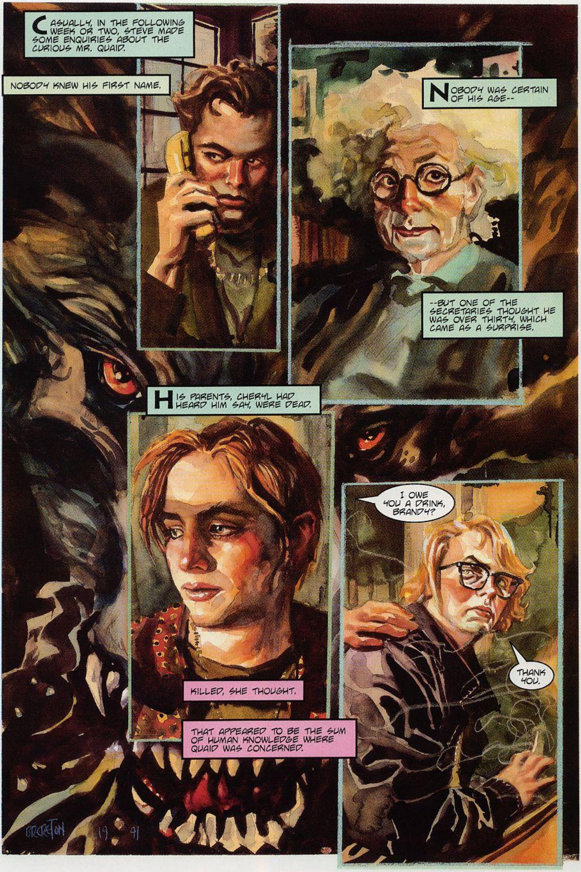

YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN DOING OLD NORSE.
WHY?
THEY DON'T EVEN BOTHER TO MARK THE PAPERS ON THAT COURSE.
STEVE HADN'T HEARD ABOUT THIS.

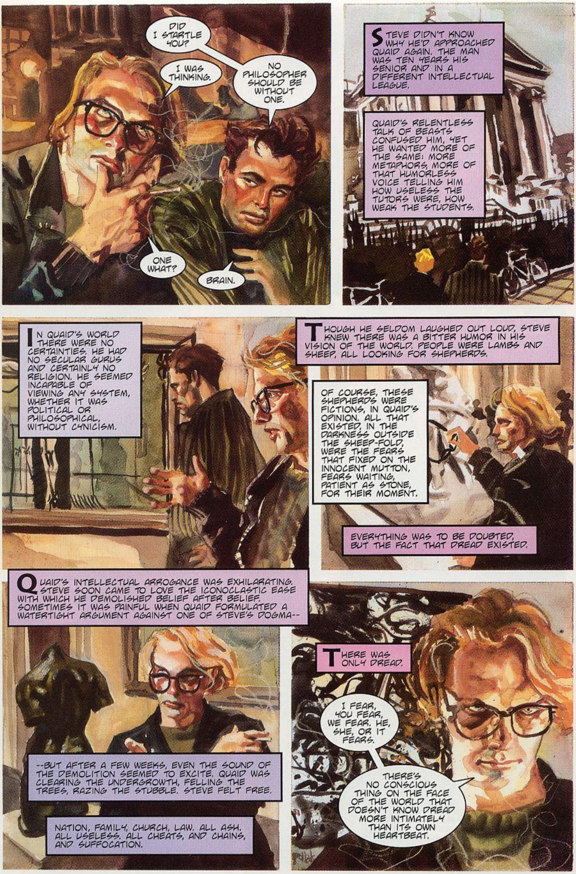

THEY JUST THROW THEM ALL UP INTO THE AIR. FACE UP, AN "A." FACE DOWN, A "B."

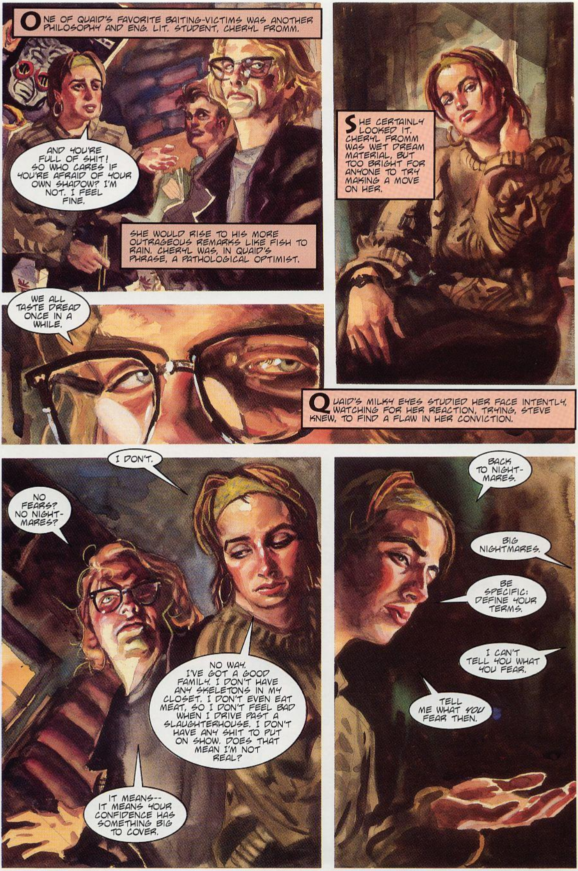

OH. IT WAS A JOKE. QUAID WAS BEING WITTY.
YOU SHOULD BE IN OLD NORSE. WHO NEEDS BISHOP BERKELEY ANYHOW? OR PLATO. OR--
OR?
IT'S ALL SHIT.
YES.

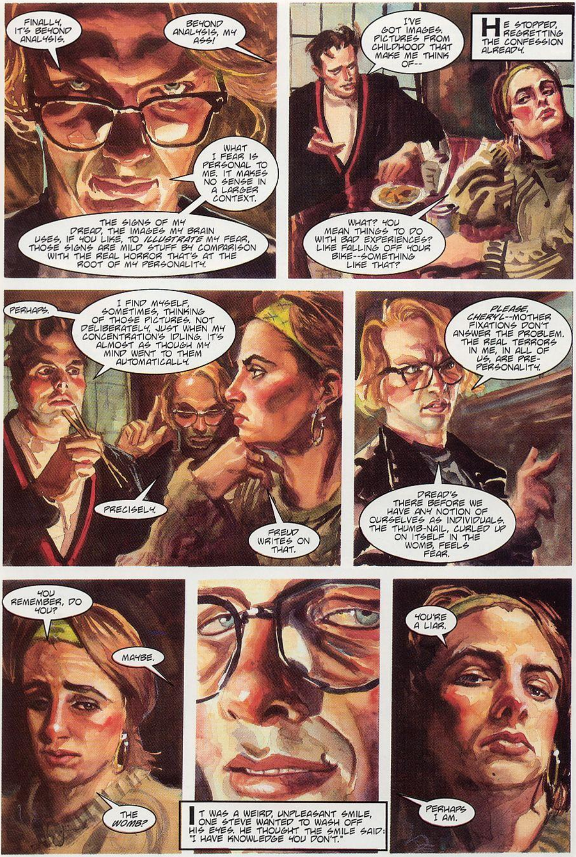

I'VE WATCHED YOU, IN THE PHILOSOPHY CLASS. YOU NEVER TAKE NOTES, DO YOU?
NO.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE EITHER SUBLIMELY CONFIDENT OR YOU SIMPLY COULDN'T CARE LESS.
NEITHER. I'M JUST COMPLETELY LOST.
IT'S NOT TRUE PHILOSOPHY THEY TEACH YOU HERE.
OH?
WE GET SPOONFED A BIT OF PLATO, OR A BIT OF BENTHAM--NO REAL ANALYSIS. IT'S GOT ALL THE RIGHT MARKINGS, OF COURSE. IT LOOKS LIKE THE BEAST--EVEN SMELLS A BIT LIKE THE BEAST TO THE UNINITIATED.
I THINK WE SHOULD FEEL MAULED BY OUR SUBJECT. WE SHOULD BE FRIGHTENED TO JUGGLE THE IDEAS WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT.
WHY?
BECAUSE IF WE WERE PHILOSOPHERS OF WORTH, WE WOULDN'T BE EXCHANGING ACADEMIC PLEASANTRIES. WE WOULDN'T BE TALKING SEMANTICS, USING LINGUISTIC TRICKERY TO COVER THE REAL CONCERNS.
WHAT WOULD WE BE DOING?
WE SHOULD BE WALKING CLOSE TO THE BEAST, STEVE...DON'T YOU THINK? REACHING OUT TO STROKE IT, PET IT, MILK IT--
WHAT...ER... WHAT IS THE BEAST?
IT'S THE SUBJECT OF ANY WORTHWHILE PHILOSOPHY, STEPHEN. IT'S THE THINGS WE FEAR, BECAUSE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM. IT'S THE DARK BEHIND THE DOOR.

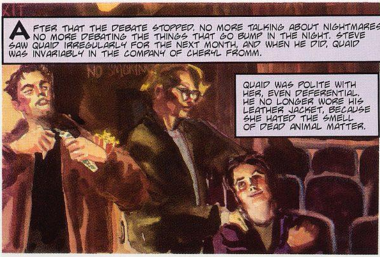

THE CIGARETTES WERE CHEAP--AGAIN, NOT THE DONE THING. YOU EITHER SMOKED GAULOISES, CAMEL, OR NOTHING AT ALL.
WHAT BEAST?
PHILOSOPHY. *TRUE* PHILOSOPHY. IT'S A BEAST, STEPHEN--DON'T YOU THINK?
IT'S WILD. IT BITES.
I HADN'T--
YES. IT BITES.
BITES.
STEPHEN NODDED. THE METAPHOR WAS BEYOND HIM.
STEVE THOUGHT OF A DOOR. THOUGHT OF THE DARK. HE BEGAN TO SEE WHAT QUAID WAS DRIVING AT IN HIS LABYRINTHINE FASHION. PHILOSOPHY WAS A WAY TO TALK ABOUT FEAR.
WE SHOULD DISCUSS WHAT'S INTIMATE TO OUR PSYCHES. IF WE DON'T, WE RISK...
WHAT?
WANT ANOTHER?
STEVE PRAYED THAT THE ANSWER WOULD BE NO.
WHAT DO WE RISK?
WELL, I THINK IF WE DON'T GO OUT AND FIND THE BEAST--
--SOONER OR LATER, THE BEAST WILL COME AND FIND *US*.
THERE IS NO DELIGHT THE EQUAL OF DREAD. AS LONG AS IT'S SOMEONE ELSE'S.

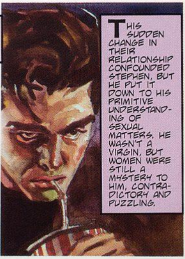

CASUALLY, IN THE FOLLOWING WEEK OR TWO, STEVE MADE SOME ENQUIRIES ABOUT THE CURIOUS MR. QUAID.
NOBODY KNEW HIS FIRST NAME.
NOBODY WAS CERTAIN OF HIS AGE--
--BUT ONE OF THE SECRETARIES THOUGHT HE WAS OVER THIRTY, WHICH CAME AS A SURPRISE.
HIS PARENTS, CHERYL HAD HEARD HIM SAY, WERE DEAD.
KILLED, SHE THOUGHT.
THAT APPEARED TO BE THE SUM OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE WHERE QUAID WAS CONCERNED.
I OWE YOU A DRINK, BRANDY?
THANK YOU.
BRERETON 19 91

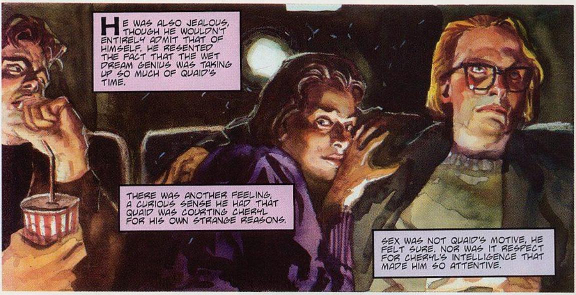

DID I STARTLE YOU?
I WAS THINKING.
NO PHILOSOPHER SHOULD BE WITHOUT ONE.
ONE WHAT?
BRAIN.
STEVE DIDN'T KNOW WHY HE'D APPROACHED QUAID AGAIN. THE MAN WAS TEN YEARS HIS SENIOR AND IN A DIFFERENT INTELLECTUAL LEAGUE.
QUAID'S RELENTLESS TALK OF BEASTS CONFUSED HIM, YET HE WANTED MORE OF THE SAME: MORE METAPHORS, MORE OF THAT HUMORLESS VOICE TELLING HIM HOW USELESS THE TUTORS WERE, HOW WEAK THE STUDENTS.
IN QUAID'S WORLD THERE WERE NO CERTAINTIES. HE HAD NO SECULAR GURUS AND CERTAINLY NO RELIGION. HE SEEMED INCAPABLE OF VIEWING ANY SYSTEM, WHETHER IT WAS POLITICAL OR PHILOSOPHICAL, WITHOUT CYNICISM.
THOUGH HE SELDOM LAUGHED OUT LOUD, STEVE KNEW THERE WAS A BITTER HUMOR IN HIS VISION OF THE WORLD. PEOPLE WERE LAMBS AND SHEEP, ALL LOOKING FOR SHEPHERDS.
OF COURSE, THESE SHEPHERDS WERE FICTIONS, IN QUAID'S OPINION. ALL THAT EXISTED, IN THE DARKNESS OUTSIDE THE SHEEP-FOLD, WERE THE FEARS THAT FIXED ON THE INNOCENT MUTTON, FEARS WAITING, PATIENT AS STONE, FOR THEIR MOMENT.
EVERYTHING WAS TO BE DOUBTED, BUT THE FACT THAT DREAD EXISTED.
QUAID'S INTELLECTUAL ARROGANCE WAS EXHILARATING. STEVE SOON CAME TO LOVE THE ICONOCLASTIC EASE WITH WHICH HE DEMOLISHED BELIEF AFTER BELIEF. SOMETIMES IT WAS PAINFUL WHEN QUAID FORMULATED A WATERTIGHT ARGUMENT AGAINST ONE OF STEVE'S DOGMA--
--BUT AFTER A FEW WEEKS, EVEN THE SOUND OF THE DEMOLITION SEEMED TO EXCITE. QUAID WAS CLEARING THE UNDERGROWTH, FELLING THE TREES, RAZING THE STUBBLE. STEVE FELT FREE.
NATION, FAMILY, CHURCH, LAW. ALL ASH. ALL USELESS. ALL CHEATS, AND CHAINS, AND SUFFOCATION.
THERE WAS ONLY DREAD.
I FEAR, YOU FEAR, WE FEAR. HE, SHE, OR IT FEARS.
THERE'S NO CONSCIOUS THING ON THE FACE OF THE WORLD THAT DOESN'T KNOW DREAD MORE INTIMATELY THAN ITS OWN HEARTBEAT.

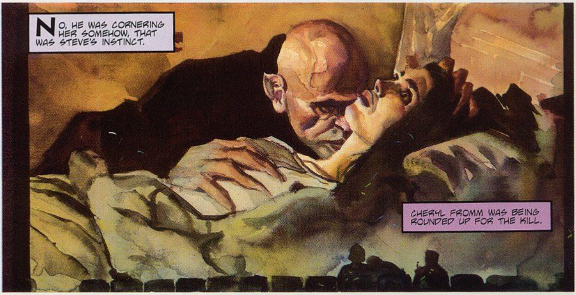

ONE OF QUAID'S FAVORITE BAITING-VICTIMS WAS ANOTHER PHILOSOPHY AND ENG. LIT. STUDENT, CHERYL FROMM.
AND YOU'RE FULL OF SHIT! SO WHO CARES IF YOU'RE AFRAID OF YOUR OWN SHADOW? I'M NOT. I FEEL FINE.
SHE WOULD RISE TO HIS MORE OUTRAGEOUS REMARKS LIKE FISH TO RAIN. CHERYL WAS, IN QUAID'S PHRASE, A PATHOLOGICAL OPTIMIST.
SHE CERTAINLY LOOKED IT. CHERYL FROMM WAS WET DREAM MATERIAL, BUT TOO BRIGHT FOR ANYONE TO TRY MAKING A MOVE ON HER.
WE ALL TASTE DREAD ONCE IN A WHILE.
QUAID'S MILKY EYES STUDIED HER FACE INTENTLY, WATCHING FOR HER REACTION, TRYING, STEVE KNEW, TO FIND A FLAW IN HER CONVICTION.
I DON'T.
NO FEARS? NO NIGHTMARES?
NO WAY. I'VE GOT A GOOD FAMILY. I DON'T HAVE ANY SKELETONS IN MY CLOSET. I DON'T EVEN EAT MEAT, SO I DON'T FEEL BAD WHEN I DRIVE PAST A SLAUGHTERHOUSE. I DON'T HAVE ANY SHIT TO PUT ON SHOW. DOES THAT MEAN I'M NOT REAL?
IT MEANS-- IT MEANS YOUR CONFIDENCE HAS SOMETHING BIG TO COVER.
BACK TO NIGHTMARES.
BIG NIGHTMARES.
BE SPECIFIC: DEFINE YOUR TERMS.
I CAN'T TELL YOU WHAT YOU FEAR.
TELL ME WHAT *YOU* FEAR THEN.

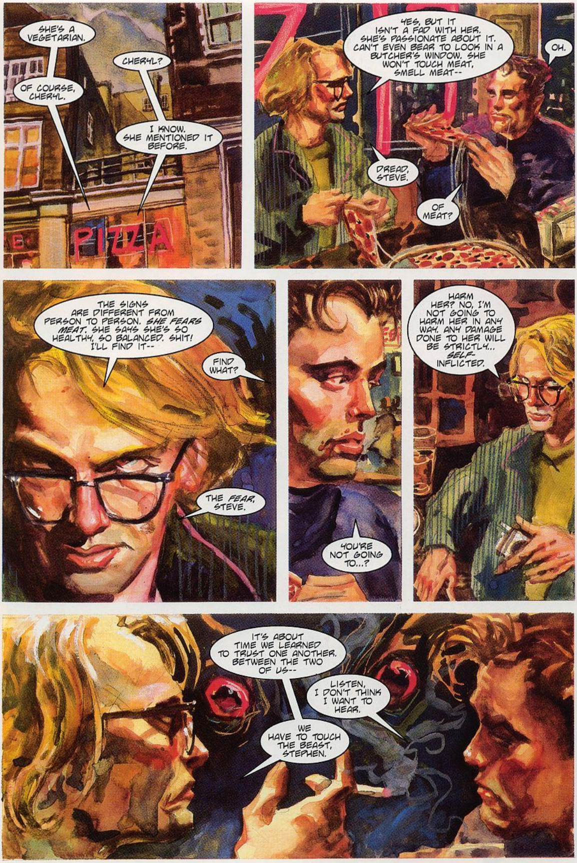

FINALLY, IT'S BEYOND ANALYSIS.
BEYOND ANALYSIS, MY ASS!
WHAT I FEAR IS PERSONAL TO ME. IT MAKES NO SENSE IN A LARGER CONTEXT.
THE SIGNS OF MY DREAD, THE IMAGES MY BRAIN USES, IF YOU LIKE, TO *ILLUSTRATE* MY FEAR, THOSE SIGNS ARE MILD STUFF BY COMPARISON WITH THE REAL HORROR THAT'S AT THE ROOT OF MY PERSONALITY.
I'VE GOT IMAGES. PICTURES FROM CHILDHOOD THAT MAKE ME THINK OF--
HE STOPPED, REGRETTING THE CONFESSION ALREADY.
WHAT? YOU MEAN THINGS TO DO WITH BAD EXPERIENCES? LIKE FALLING OFF YOUR BIKE--SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
PERHAPS.
I FIND MYSELF, SOMETIMES, THINKING OF THOSE PICTURES. NOT DELIBERATELY, JUST WHEN MY CONCENTRATION'S IDLING. IT'S ALMOST AS THOUGH MY MIND WENT TO THEM AUTOMATICALLY.
PRECISELY.
FREUD WRITES ON THAT.
PLEASE, CHERYL--MOTHER FIXATIONS DON'T ANSWER THE PROBLEM. THE REAL TERRORS IN ME, IN ALL OF US, ARE PRE-PERSONALITY.
DREAD'S THERE BEFORE WE HAVE ANY NOTION OF OURSELVES AS INDIVIDUALS. THE THUMB-NAIL, CURLED UP ON ITSELF IN THE WOMB, FEELS FEAR.
YOU REMEMBER, DO YOU?
MAYBE.
THE *WOMB?*
IT WAS A WEIRD, UNPLEASANT SMILE, ONE STEVE WANTED TO WASH OFF HIS EYES. HE THOUGHT THE SMILE SAID: "I HAVE KNOWLEDGE YOU DON'T."
YOU'RE A LIAR.
PERHAPS I AM.

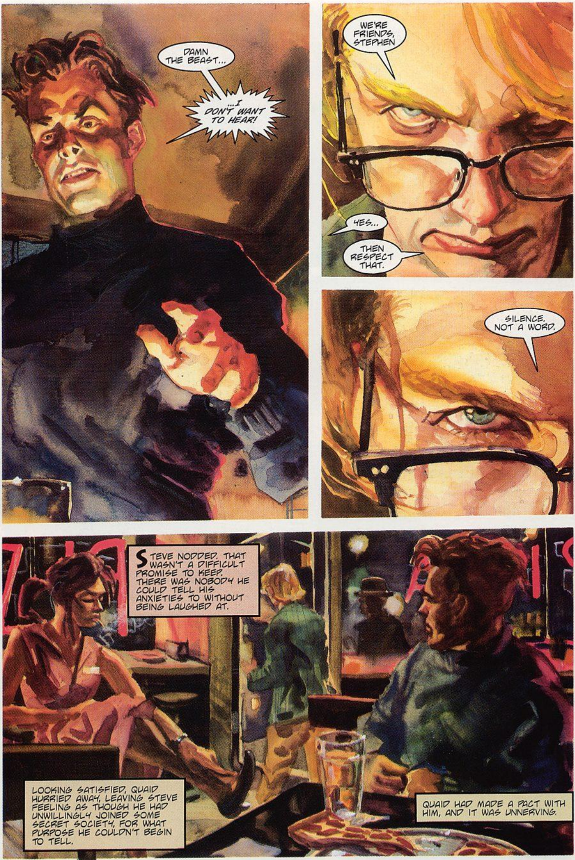

AFTER THAT THE DEBATE STOPPED. NO MORE TALKING ABOUT NIGHTMARES. NO MORE DEBATING THE THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT. STEVE SAW QUAID IRREGULARLY FOR THE NEXT MONTH, AND WHEN HE DID, QUAID WAS INVARIABLY IN THE COMPANY OF CHERYL FROMM.
NO SMOKIN
QUAID WAS POLITE WITH HER, EVEN DEFERENTIAL. HE NO LONGER WORE HIS LEATHER JACKET, BECAUSE SHE HATED THE SMELL OF DEAD ANIMAL MATTER.

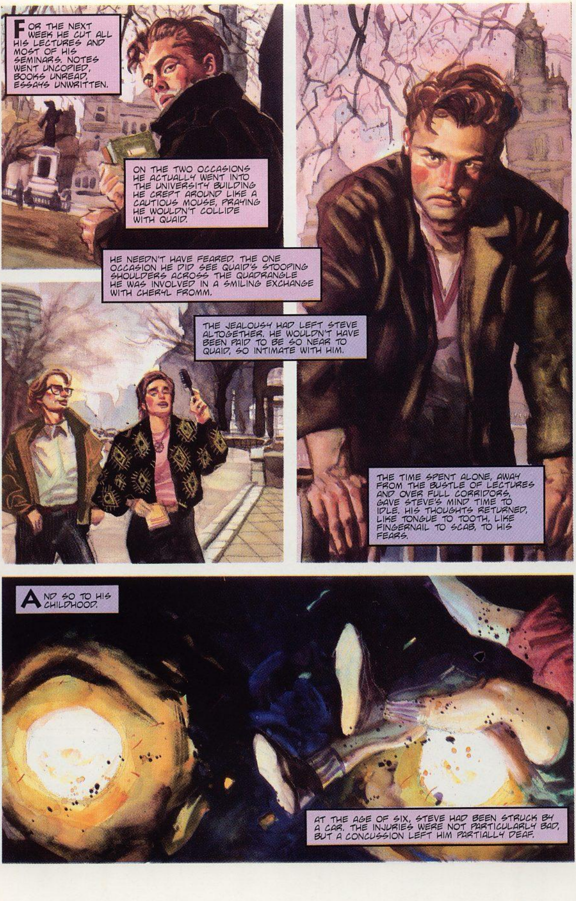

THIS SUDDEN CHANGE IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP CONFOUNDED STEPHEN, BUT HE PUT IT DOWN TO HIS PRIMITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF SEXUAL MATTERS. HE WASN'T A VIRGIN, BUT WOMEN WERE STILL A MYSTERY TO HIM, CONTRADICTORY AND PUZZLING.

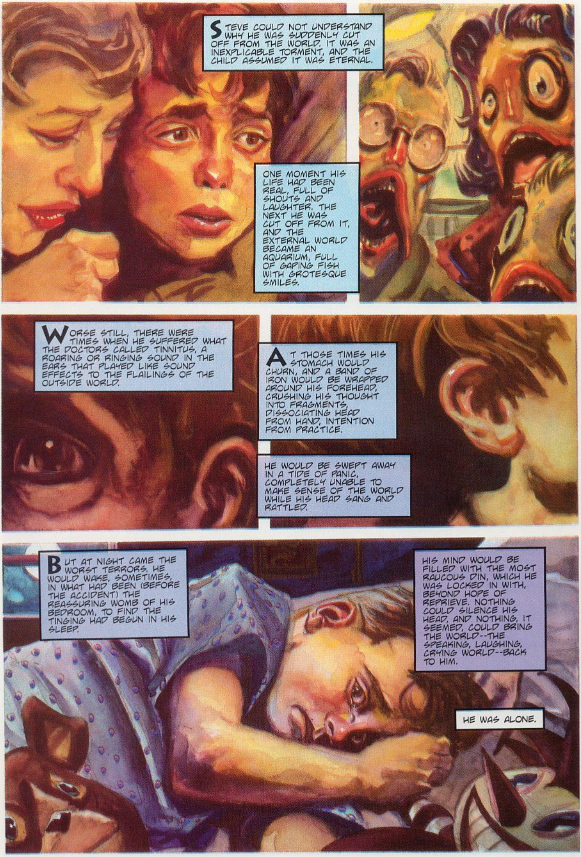

HE WAS ALSO JEALOUS, THOUGH HE WOULDN'T ENTIRELY ADMIT THAT OF HIMSELF. HE RESENTED THE FACT THAT THE WET DREAM GENIUS WAS TAKING UP SO MUCH OF QUAID'S TIME.
THERE WAS ANOTHER FEELING, A CURIOUS SENSE HE HAD THAT QUAID WAS COURTING CHERYL FOR HIS OWN STRANGE REASONS.
SEX WAS NOT QUAID'S MOTIVE, HE FELT SURE. NOR WAS IT RESPECT FOR CHERYL'S INTELLIGENCE THAT MADE HIM SO ATTENTIVE.

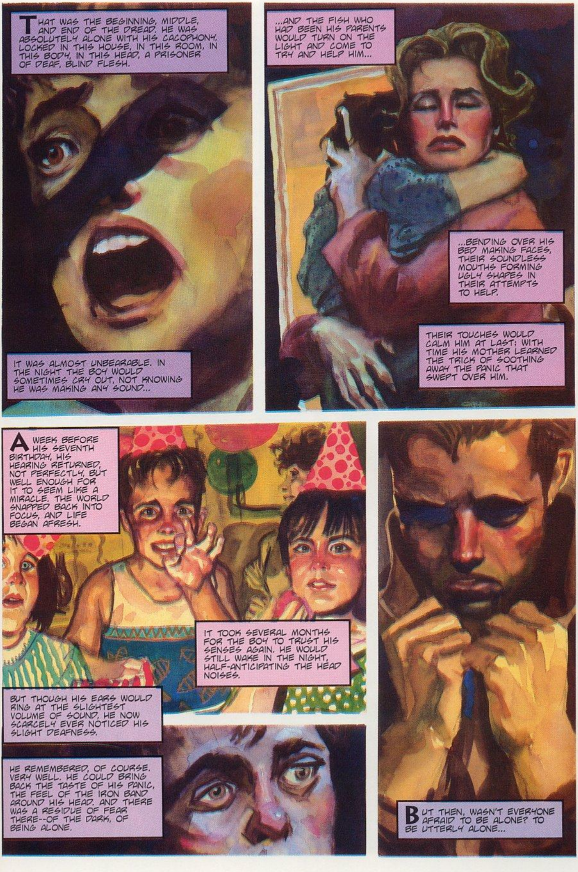

NO, HE WAS CORNERING HER SOMEHOW, THAT WAS STEVE'S INSTINCT.
CHERYL FROMM WAS BEING ROUNDED UP FOR THE KILL.

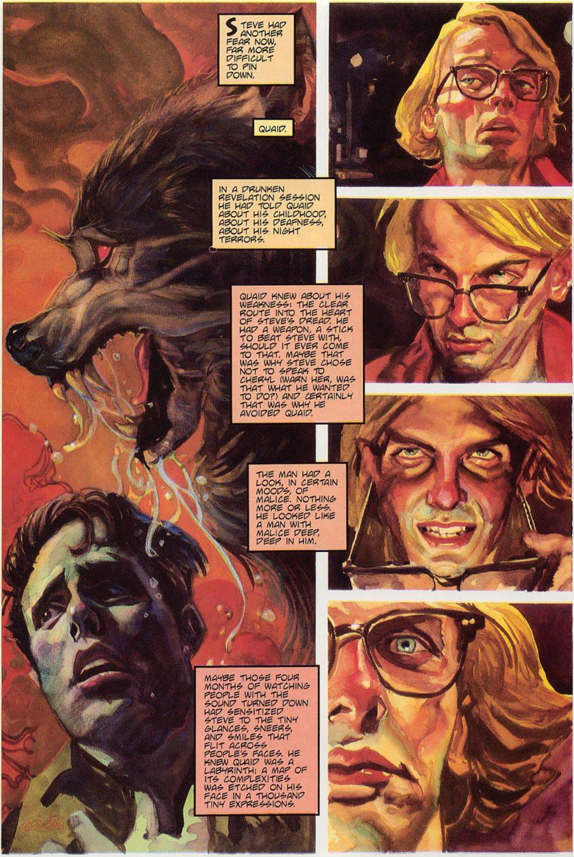

SHE'S A VEGETARIAN.
CHERYL?
OF COURSE, CHERYL.
I KNOW. SHE MENTIONED IT BEFORE.
PIZZA
YES, BUT IT ISN'T A FAD WITH HER. SHE'S PASSIONATE ABOUT IT. CAN'T EVEN BEAR TO LOOK IN A BUTCHER'S WINDOW. SHE WON'T TOUCH MEAT, SMELL MEAT--
OH.
DREAD, STEVE.
OF MEAT?
THE SIGNS ARE DIFFERENT FROM PERSON TO PERSON. *SHE FEARS MEAT.* SHE SAYS SHE'S SO HEALTHY, SO BALANCED. SHIT! I'LL FIND IT--
FIND WHAT?
THE *FEAR,* STEVE.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO...?
HARM HER? NO, I'M NOT GOING TO HARM HER IN ANY WAY. ANY DAMAGE DONE TO HER WILL BE STRICTLY... *SELF-INFLICTED.*
IT'S ABOUT TIME WE LEARNED TO TRUST ONE ANOTHER. BETWEEN THE TWO OF US--
LISTEN, I DON'T THINK I WANT TO HEAR.
WE HAVE TO TOUCH THE BEAST, STEPHEN.

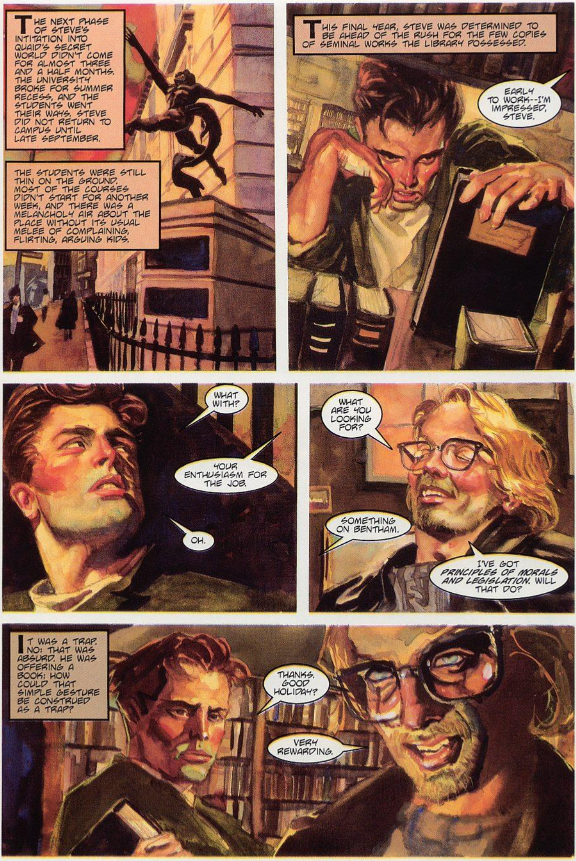

DAMN THE BEAST...
...I DON'T WANT TO HEAR!
WE'RE FRIENDS, STEPHEN
YES...
THEN RESPECT THAT.
SILENCE. NOT A WORD.
STEVE NODDED. THAT WASN'T A DIFFICULT PROMISE TO KEEP. THERE WAS NOBODY HE COULD TELL HIS ANXIETIES TO WITHOUT BEING LAUGHED AT.
LOOKING SATISFIED, QUAID HURRIED AWAY, LEAVING STEVE FEELING AS THOUGH HE HAD UNWILLINGLY JOINED SOME SECRET SOCIETY, FOR WHAT PURPOSE HE COULDN'T BEGIN TO TELL.
QUAID HAD MADE A PACT WITH HIM, AND IT WAS UNNERVING.

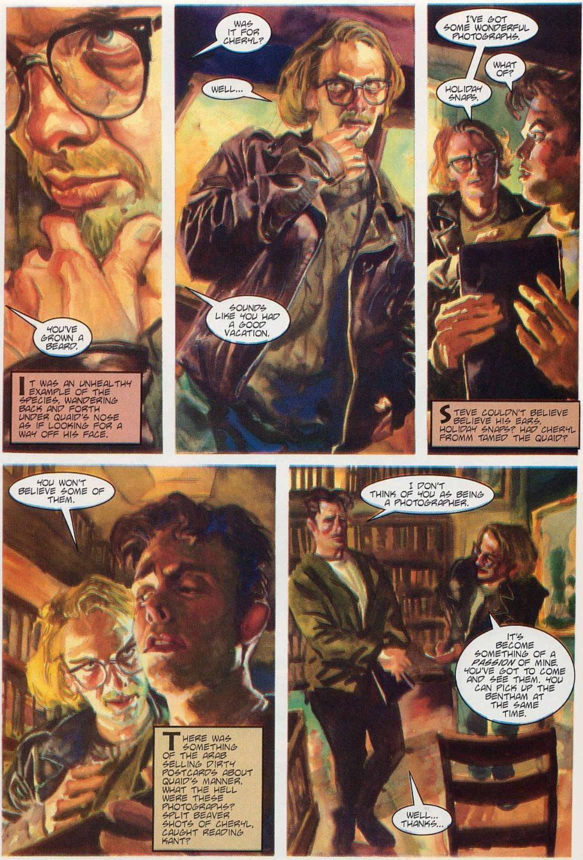

FOR THE NEXT WEEK HE CUT ALL HIS LECTURES AND MOST OF HIS SEMINARS. NOTES WENT UNCOPIED, BOOKS UNREAD, ESSAYS UNWRITTEN.
ON THE TWO OCCASIONS HE ACTUALLY WENT INTO THE UNIVERSITY BUILDING HE CREPT AROUND LIKE A CAUTIOUS MOUSE, PRAYING HE WOULDN'T COLLIDE WITH QUAID.
HE NEEDN'T HAVE FEARED. THE ONE OCCASION HE DID SEE QUAID'S STOOPING SHOULDERS ACROSS THE QUADRANGLE HE WAS INVOLVED IN A SMILING EXCHANGE WITH CHERYL FROMM.
THE JEALOUSY HAD LEFT STEVE ALTOGETHER. HE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN PAID TO BE SO NEAR TO QUAID, SO INTIMATE WITH HIM.
THE TIME SPENT ALONE, AWAY FROM THE BUSTLE OF LECTURES AND OVER FULL CORRIDORS, GAVE STEVE'S MIND TIME TO IDLE. HIS THOUGHTS RETURNED, LIKE TONGUE TO TOOTH, LIKE FINGERNAIL TO SCAB, TO HIS FEARS.
AND SO TO HIS CHILDHOOD.
AT THE AGE OF SIX, STEVE HAD BEEN STRUCK BY A CAR. THE INJURIES WERE NOT PARTICULARLY BAD, BUT A CONCUSSION LEFT HIM PARTIALLY DEAF.

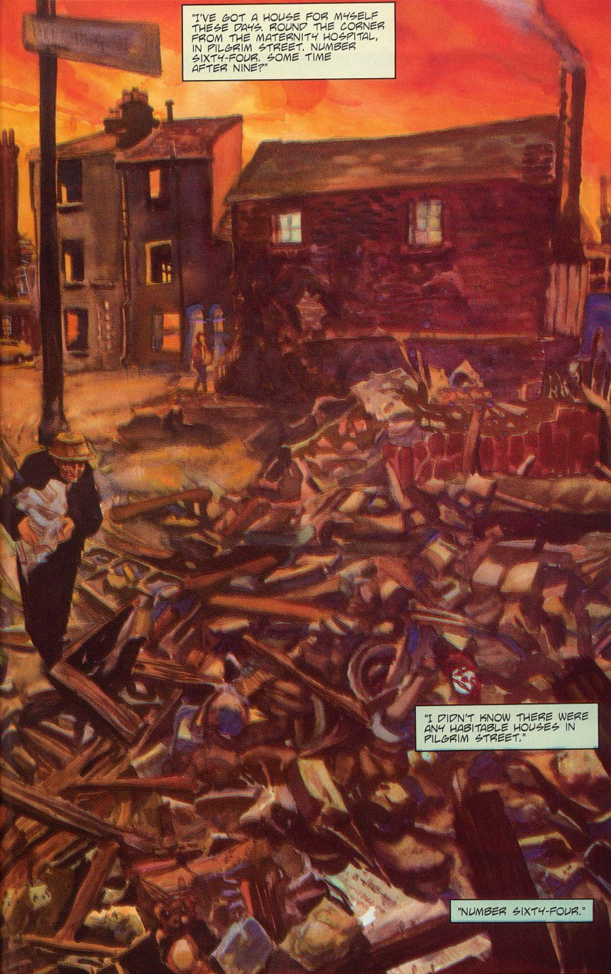

STEVE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY HE WAS SUDDENLY CUT OFF FROM THE WORLD. IT WAS AN INEXPLICABLE TORMENT, AND THE CHILD ASSUMED IT WAS ETERNAL.
ONE MOMENT HIS LIFE HAD BEEN REAL, FULL OF SHOUTS AND LAUGHTER. THE NEXT HE WAS CUT OFF FROM IT, AND THE EXTERNAL WORLD BECAME AN AQUARIUM, FULL OF GAPING FISH WITH GROTESQUE SMILES.
WORSE STILL, THERE WERE TIMES WHEN HE SUFFERED WHAT THE DOCTORS CALLED TINNITUS, A ROARING OR RINGING SOUND IN THE EARS THAT PLAYED LIKE SOUND EFFECTS TO THE FLAILINGS OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD.
AT THOSE TIMES HIS STOMACH WOULD CHURN, AND A BAND OF IRON WOULD BE WRAPPED AROUND HIS FOREHEAD, CRUSHING HIS THOUGHT INTO FRAGMENTS, DISSOCIATING HEAD FROM HAND, INTENTION FROM PRACTICE.
HE WOULD BE SWEPT AWAY IN A TIDE OF PANIC, COMPLETELY UNABLE TO MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD WHILE HIS HEAD SANG AND RATTLED.
BUT AT NIGHT CAME THE WORST TERRORS. HE WOULD WAKE, SOMETIMES, IN WHAT HAD BEEN (BEFORE THE ACCIDENT) THE REASSURING WOMB OF HIS BEDROOM, TO FIND THE TINGING HAD BEGUN IN HIS SLEEP.
HIS MIND WOULD BE FILLED WITH THE MOST RAUCOUS DIN, WHICH HE WAS LOCKED IN WITH, BEYOND HOPE OF REPRIEVE. NOTHING COULD SILENCE HIS HEAD, AND NOTHING, IT SEEMED, COULD BRING THE WORLD--THE SPEAKING, LAUGHING, CRYING WORLD--BACK TO HIM.
HE WAS ALONE.

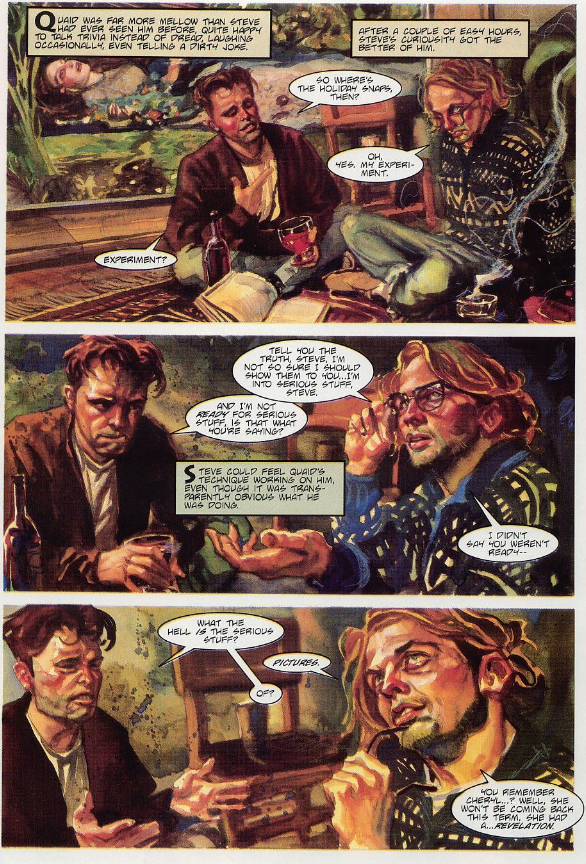

THAT WAS THE BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END OF THE DREAD. HE WAS ABSOLUTELY ALONE WITH HIS CACOPHONY, LOCKED IN THIS HOUSE, IN THIS ROOM, IN THIS BODY, IN THIS HEAD, A PRISONER OF DEAF, BLIND FLESH.
IT WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE. IN THE NIGHT THE BOY WOULD SOMETIMES CRY OUT, NOT KNOWING HE WAS MAKING ANY SOUND...
...AND THE FISH WHO HAD BEEN HIS PARENTS WOULD TURN ON THE LIGHT AND COME TO TRY AND HELP HIM...
...BENDING OVER HIS BED MAKING FACES, THEIR SOUNDLESS MOUTHS FORMING UGLY SHAPES IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO HELP.
THEIR TOUCHES WOULD CALM HIM AT LAST; WITH TIME HIS MOTHER LEARNED THE TRICK OF SOOTHING AWAY THE PANIC THAT SWEPT OVER HIM.
A WEEK BEFORE HIS SEVENTH BIRTHDAY, HIS HEARING RETURNED, NOT PERFECTLY, BUT WELL ENOUGH FOR IT TO SEEM LIKE A MIRACLE. THE WORLD SNAPPED BACK INTO FOCUS, AND LIFE BEGAN AFRESH.
IT TOOK SEVERAL MONTHS FOR THE BOY TO TRUST HIS SENSES AGAIN. HE WOULD STILL WAKE IN THE NIGHT, HALF-ANTICIPATING THE HEAD NOISES.
BUT THOUGH HIS EARS WOULD RING AT THE SLIGHTEST VOLUME OF SOUND, HE NOW SCARCELY EVER NOTICED HIS SLIGHT DEAFNESS.
HE REMEMBERED, OF COURSE. VERY WELL. HE COULD BRING BACK THE TASTE OF HIS PANIC, THE FEEL OF THE IRON BAND AROUND HIS HEAD. AND THERE WAS A RESIDUE OF FEAR THERE--OF THE DARK, OF BEING ALONE.
BUT THEN, WASN'T EVERYONE AFRAID TO BE ALONE? TO BE UTTERLY ALONE...

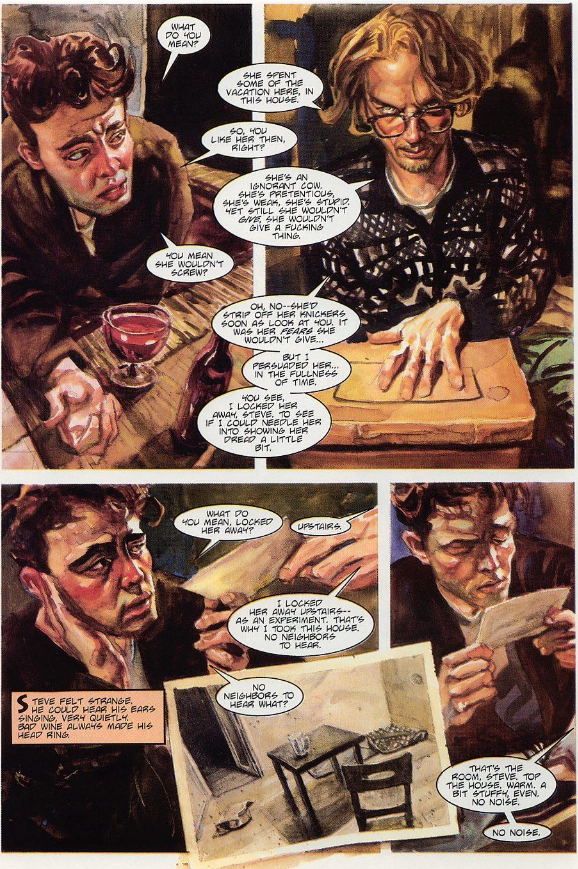

STEVE HAD ANOTHER FEAR NOW, FAR MORE DIFFICULT TO PIN DOWN.
QUAID.
IN A DRUNKEN REVELATION SESSION HE HAD TOLD QUAID ABOUT HIS CHILDHOOD, ABOUT HIS DEAFNESS, ABOUT HIS NIGHT TERRORS.
QUAID KNEW ABOUT HIS WEAKNESS: THE CLEAR ROUTE INTO THE HEART OF STEVE'S DREAD. HE HAD A WEAPON, A STICK TO BEAT STEVE WITH, SHOULD IT EVER COME TO THAT. MAYBE THAT WAS WHY STEVE CHOSE NOT TO SPEAK TO CHERYL (WARN HER, WAS THAT WHAT HE WANTED TO DO?) AND CERTAINLY THAT WAS WHY HE AVOIDED QUAID.
THE MAN HAD A LOOK, IN CERTAIN MOODS, OF MALICE. NOTHING MORE OR LESS. HE LOOKED LIKE A MAN WITH MALICE DEEP, DEEP IN HIM.
MAYBE THOSE FOUR MONTHS OF WATCHING PEOPLE WITH THE SOUND TURNED DOWN HAD SENSITIZED STEVE TO THE TINY GLANCES, SNEERS, AND SMILES THAT FLIT ACROSS PEOPLE'S FACES. HE KNEW QUAID WAS A LABYRINTH: A MAP OF ITS COMPLEXITIES WAS ETCHED ON HIS FACE IN A THOUSAND TINY EXPRESSIONS.

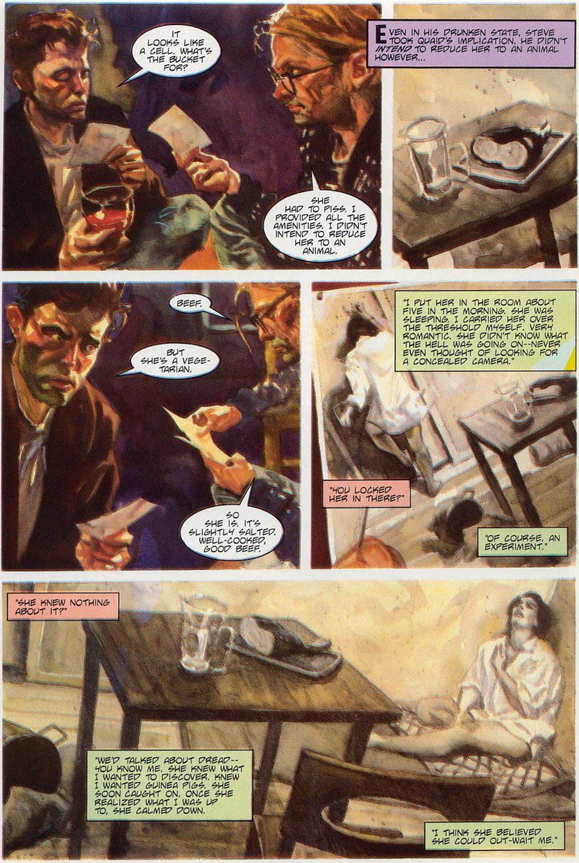

THE NEXT PHASE OF STEVE'S INTITATION INTO QUAID'S SECRET WORLD DIDN'T COME FOR ALMOST THREE AND A HALF MONTHS. THE UNIVERSITY BROKE FOR SUMMER RECESS, AND THE STUDENTS WENT THEIR WAYS. STEVE DID NOT RETURN TO CAMPUS UNTIL LATE SEPTEMBER.
THE STUDENTS WERE STILL THIN ON THE GROUND. MOST OF THE COURSES DIDN'T START FOR ANOTHER WEEK, AND THERE WAS A MELANCHOLY AIR ABOUT THE PLACE WITHOUT ITS USUAL MELEE OF COMPLAINING, FLIRTING, ARGUING KIDS.
THIS FINAL YEAR, STEVE WAS DETERMINED TO BE AHEAD OF THE RUSH FOR THE FEW COPIES OF SEMINAL WORKS THE LIBRARY POSSESSED.
EARLY TO WORK--I'M IMPRESSED, STEVE.
WHAT WITH?
YOUR ENTHUSIASM FOR THE JOB.
OH.
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?
SOMETHING ON BENTHAM.
I'VE GOT *PRINCIPLES OF MORALS AND LEGISLATION.* WILL THAT DO?
IT WAS A TRAP. NO: THAT WAS ABSURD. HE WAS OFFERING A BOOK; HOW COULD THAT SIMPLE GESTURE BE CONSTRUED AS A TRAP?
THANKS. GOOD HOLIDAY?
VERY REWARDING.

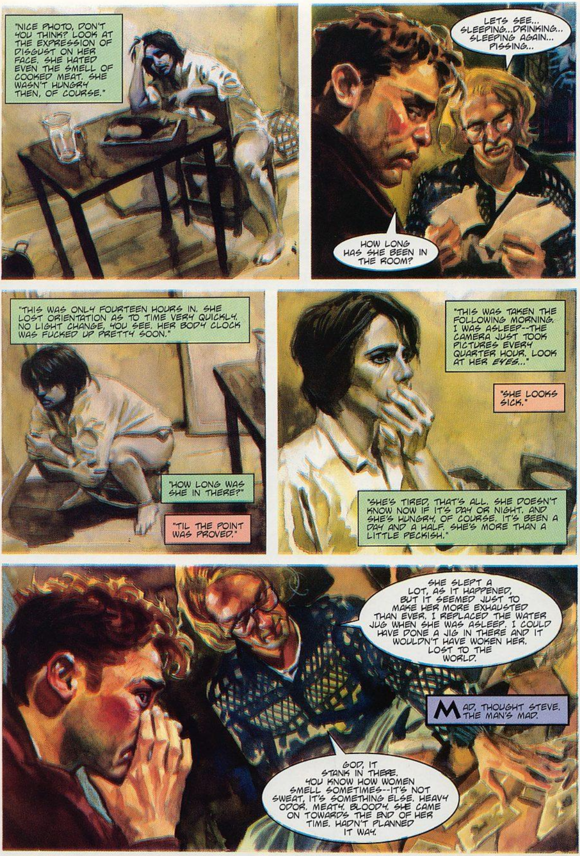

YOU'VE GROWN A BEARD.
IT WAS AN UNHEALTHY EXAMPLE OF THE SPECIES, WANDERING BACK AND FORTH UNDER QUAID'S NOSE AS IF LOOKING FOR A WAY OFF HIS FACE.
WAS IT FOR CHERYL?
WELL...
SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAD A GOOD VACATION.
I'VE GOT SOME WONDERFUL PHOTOGRAPHS.
WHAT OF?
HOLIDAY SNAPS.
STEVE COULDN'T BELIEVE BELIEVE HIS EARS. HOLIDAY SNAPS? HAD CHERYL FROMM TAMED THE QUAID?
YOU WON'T BELIEVE SOME OF THEM.
THERE WAS SOMETHING OF THE ARAB SELLING DIRTY POSTCARDS ABOUT QUAID'S MANNER. WHAT THE HELL WERE THESE PHOTOGRAPHS? SPLIT BEAVER SHOTS OF CHERYL, CAUGHT READING KANT?
I DON'T THINK OF YOU AS BEING A PHOTOGRAPHER.
IT'S BECOME SOMETHING OF A *PASSION* OF MINE. YOU'VE GOT TO COME AND SEE THEM. YOU CAN PICK UP THE BENTHAM AT THE SAME TIME.
WELL... THANKS...

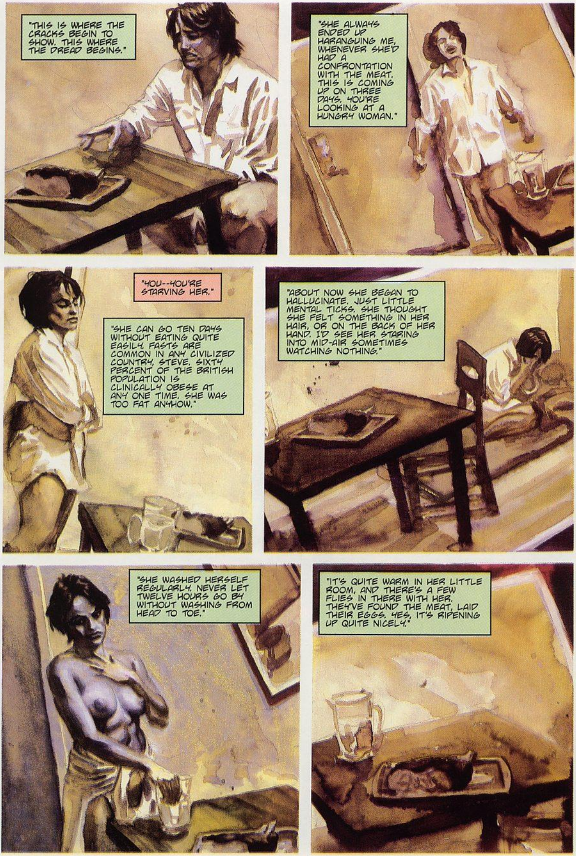

"I'VE GOT A HOUSE FOR MYSELF THESE DAYS. ROUND THE CORNER FROM THE MATERNITY HOSPITAL, IN PILGRIM STREET. NUMBER SIXTY-FOUR. SOME TIME AFTER NINE?"
"I DIDN'T KNOW THERE WERE ANY HABITABLE HOUSES IN PILGRIM STREET."
"NUMBER SIXTY-FOUR."

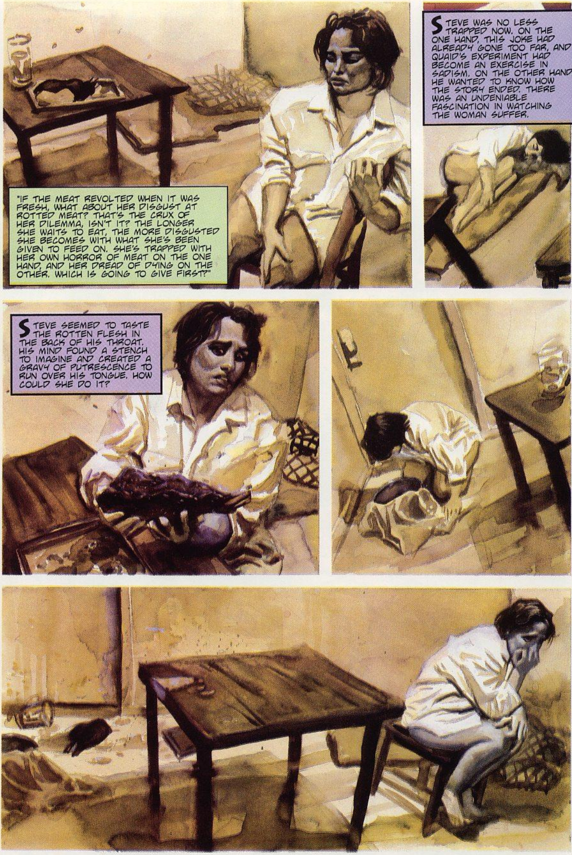

QUAID WAS FAR MORE MELLOW THAN STEVE HAD EVER SEEN HIM BEFORE, QUITE HAPPY TO TALK TRIVIA INSTEAD OF DREAD, LAUGHING OCCASIONALLY, EVEN TELLING A DIRTY JOKE.
AFTER A COUPLE OF EASY HOURS, STEVE'S CURIOUSITY GOT THE BETTER OF HIM.
SO WHERE'S THE HOLIDAY SNAPS, THEN?
OH, YES. MY EXPERIMENT.
EXPERIMENT?
TELL YOU THE TRUTH, STEVE, I'M NOT SO SURE I SHOULD SHOW THEM TO YOU...I'M INTO SERIOUS STUFF, STEVE.
AND I'M NOT *READY* FOR SERIOUS STUFF, IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?
STEVE COULD FEEL QUAID'S TECHNIQUE WORKING ON HIM, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS TRANSPARENTLY OBVIOUS WHAT HE WAS DOING.
I DIDN'T SAY YOU WEREN'T READY--
WHAT THE HELL *IS* THE SERIOUS STUFF?
PICTURES.
OF?
YOU REMEMBER CHERYL...? WELL, SHE WON'T BE COMING BACK THIS TERM. SHE HAD A...*REVELATION.*

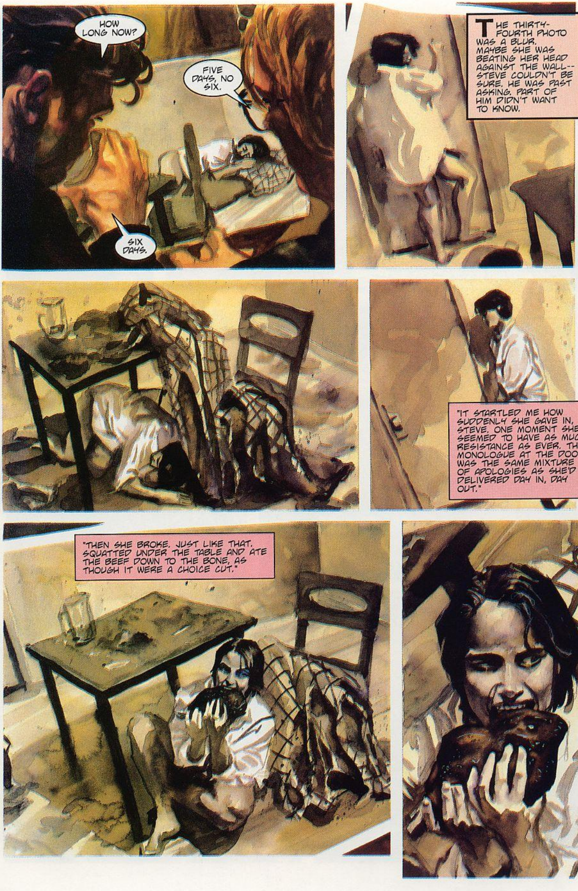

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
SHE SPENT SOME OF THE VACATION HERE, IN THIS HOUSE.
SO, YOU LIKE HER THEN, RIGHT?
SHE'S AN IGNORANT COW. SHE'S PRETENTIOUS, SHE'S WEAK, SHE'S STUPID. YET STILL SHE WOULDN'T *GIVE*, SHE WOULDN'T GIVE A FUCKING THING.
YOU MEAN SHE WOULDN'T SCREW?
OH, NO--SHE'D STRIP OFF HER KNICKERS SOON AS LOOK AT YOU. IT WAS HER *FEARS* SHE WOULDN'T GIVE...
BUT I PERSUADED HER... IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME.
YOU SEE, I LOCKED HER AWAY, STEVE, TO SEE IF I COULD NEEDLE HER INTO SHOWING HER DREAD A LITTLE BIT.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, LOCKED HER AWAY?
UPSTAIRS.
I LOCKED HER AWAY UPSTAIRS-- AS AN EXPERIMENT. THAT'S WHY I TOOK THIS HOUSE. NO NEIGHBORS TO HEAR.
NO NEIGHBORS TO HEAR WHAT?
STEVE FELT STRANGE. HE COULD HEAR HIS EARS SINGING, VERY QUIETLY. BAD WINE ALWAYS MADE HIS HEAD RING.
THAT'S THE ROOM, STEVE. TOP THE HOUSE. WARM. A BIT STUFFY, EVEN. NO NOISE.
NO NOISE.

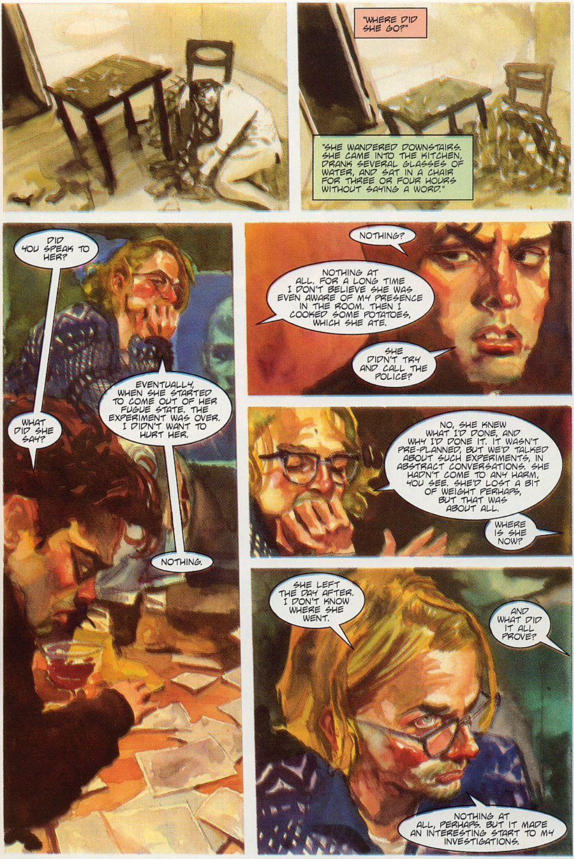

IT LOOKS LIKE A CELL. WHAT'S THE BUCKET FOR?
SHE HAD TO PISS. I PROVIDED ALL THE AMENITIES. I DIDN'T INTEND TO REDUCE HER TO AN ANIMAL.
EVEN IN HIS DRUNKEN STATE, STEVE TOOK QUAID'S IMPLICATION. HE DIDN'T *INTEND* TO REDUCE HER TO AN ANIMAL HOWEVER...
BEEF.
BUT SHE'S A VEGETARIAN.
SO SHE IS. IT'S SLIGHTLY SALTED. WELL-COOKED. GOOD BEEF.
"I PUT HER IN THE ROOM ABOUT FIVE IN THE MORNING. SHE WAS SLEEPING. I CARRIED HER OVER THE THRESHOLD MYSELF. VERY ROMANTIC. SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON--NEVER EVEN THOUGHT OF LOOKING FOR A CONCEALED CAMERA."
"YOU LOCKED HER IN THERE?"
"OF COURSE. AN EXPERIMENT."
"SHE KNEW NOTHING ABOUT IT?"
"WE'D TALKED ABOUT DREAD--YOU KNOW ME. SHE KNEW WHAT I WANTED TO DISCOVER. KNEW I WANTED GUINEA PIGS. SHE SOON CAUGHT ON. ONCE SHE REALIZED WHAT I WAS UP TO, SHE CALMED DOWN.
"I THINK SHE BELIEVED SHE COULD OUT-WAIT ME."

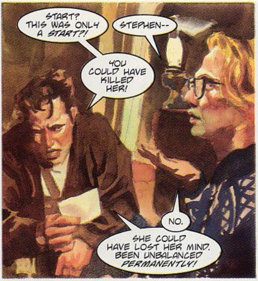

"NICE PHOTO, DON'T YOU THINK? LOOK AT THE EXPRESSION OF DISGUST ON HER FACE. SHE HATED EVEN THE SMELL OF COOKED MEAT. SHE WASN'T HUNGRY THEN, OF COURSE."
HOW LONG HAS SHE BEEN IN THE ROOM?
LETS SEE... SLEEPING...DRINKING... SLEEPING AGAIN... PISSING...
"THIS WAS ONLY FOURTEEN HOURS IN. SHE LOST ORIENTATION AS TO TIME VERY QUICKLY. NO LIGHT CHANGE, YOU SEE. HER BODY CLOCK WAS FUCKED UP PRETTY SOON."
"HOW LONG WAS SHE IN THERE?"
"TIL THE POINT WAS PROVED."
"THIS WAS TAKEN THE FOLLOWING MORNING. I WAS ASLEEP--THE CAMERA JUST TOOK PICTURES EVERY QUARTER HOUR. LOOK AT HER *EYES*..."
"SHE LOOKS SICK."
"SHE'S TIRED, THAT'S ALL. SHE DOESN'T KNOW NOW IF IT'S DAY OR NIGHT. AND SHE'S HUNGRY, OF COURSE. IT'S BEEN A DAY AND A HALF. SHE'S MORE THAN A LITTLE PECKISH."
SHE SLEPT A LOT, AS IT HAPPENED, BUT IT SEEMED JUST TO MAKE HER MORE EXHAUSTED THAN EVER. I REPLACED THE WATER JUG WHEN SHE WAS ASLEEP. I COULD HAVE DONE A JIG IN THERE AND IT WOULDN'T HAVE WOKEN HER. LOST TO THE WORLD.
MAD, THOUGHT STEVE. THE MAN'S MAD.
GOD, IT STANK IN THERE. YOU KNOW HOW WOMEN SMELL SOMETIMES--IT'S NOT SWEAT, IT'S SOMETHING ELSE. HEAVY ODOR. MEATY. BLOODY. SHE CAME ON TOWARDS THE END OF HER TIME. HADN'T PLANNED IT WAY.

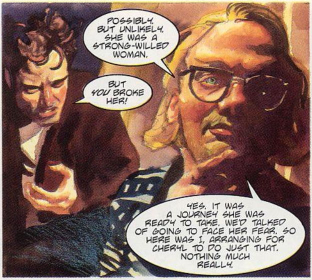

"THIS IS WHERE THE CRACKS BEGIN TO SHOW. THIS WHERE THE DREAD BEGINS."
"SHE ALWAYS ENDED UP HARANGUING ME, WHENEVER SHE'D HAD A CONFRONTATION WITH THE MEAT. THIS IS COMING UP ON THREE DAYS. YOU'RE LOOKING AT A HUNGRY WOMAN."
"YOU--YOU'RE STARVING HER."
"SHE CAN GO TEN DAYS WITHOUT EATING QUITE EASILY. FASTS ARE COMMON IN ANY CIVILIZED COUNTRY, STEVE. SIXTY PERCENT OF THE BRITISH POPULATION IS CLINICALLY OBESE AT ANY ONE TIME. SHE WAS TOO FAT ANYHOW."
"ABOUT NOW SHE BEGAN TO HALLUCINATE. JUST LITTLE MENTAL TICKS. SHE THOUGHT SHE FELT SOMETHING IN HER HAIR, OR ON THE BACK OF HER HAND. I'D SEE HER STARING INTO MID-AIR SOMETIMES WATCHING NOTHING."
"SHE WASHED HERSELF REGULARLY. NEVER LET TWELVE HOURS GO BY WITHOUT WASHING FROM HEAD TO TOE."
"IT'S QUITE WARM IN HER LITTLE ROOM, AND THERE'S A FEW FLIES IN THERE WITH HER. THEY'VE FOUND THE MEAT, LAID THEIR EGGS. YES, IT'S RIPENING UP QUITE NICELY."

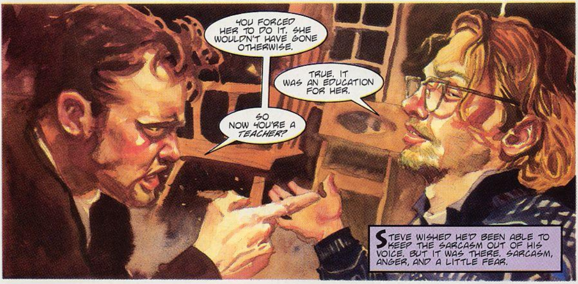

STEVE WAS NO LESS TRAPPED NOW. ON THE ONE HAND, THIS JOKE HAD ALREADY GONE TOO FAR, AND QUAID'S EXPERIMENT HAD BECOME AN EXERCISE IN SADISM. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE WANTED TO KNOW HOW THE STORY ENDED. THERE WAS AN UNDENIABLE FASCINATION IN WATCHING THE WOMAN SUFFER.
"IF THE MEAT REVOLTED WHEN IT WAS FRESH, WHAT ABOUT HER DISGUST AT ROTTED MEAT? THAT'S THE CRUX OF HER DILEMMA, ISN'T IT? THE LONGER SHE WAITS TO EAT, THE MORE DISGUSTED SHE BECOMES WITH WHAT SHE'S BEEN GIVEN TO FEED ON. SHE'S TRAPPED WITH HER OWN HORROR OF MEAT ON THE ONE HAND, AND HER DREAD OF DYING ON THE OTHER. WHICH IS GOING TO GIVE FIRST?"
STEVE SEEMED TO TASTE THE ROTTEN FLESH IN THE BACK OF HIS THROAT. HIS MIND FOUND A STENCH TO IMAGINE AND CREATED A GRAVY OF PUTRESCENCE TO RUN OVER HIS TONGUE. HOW COULD SHE DO IT?

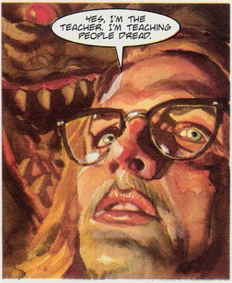

HOW LONG NOW?
FIVE DAYS, NO SIX.
SIX DAYS.
THE THIRTY-FOURTH PHOTO WAS A BLUR. MAYBE SHE WAS BEATING HER HEAD AGAINST THE WALL--STEVE COULDN'T BE SURE. HE WAS PAST ASKING. PART OF HIM DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW.
"IT STARTLED ME HOW SUDDENLY SHE GAVE IN, STEVE. ONE MOMENT SHE SEEMED TO HAVE AS MUCH RESISTANCE AS EVER. THE MONOLOGUE AT THE DOOR WAS THE SAME MIXTURE OF APOLOGIES AS SHE'D DELIVERED DAY IN, DAY OUT."
"THEN SHE BROKE. JUST LIKE THAT. SQUATTED UNDER THE TABLE AND ATE THE BEEF DOWN TO THE BONE, AS THOUGH IT WERE A CHOICE CUT."

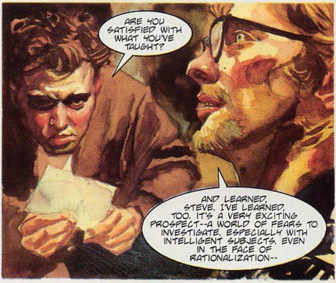

"WHERE DID SHE GO?"
"SHE WANDERED DOWNSTAIRS. SHE CAME INTO THE KITCHEN, DRANK SEVERAL GLASSES OF WATER, AND SAT IN A CHAIR FOR THREE OR FOUR HOURS WITHOUT SAYING A WORD."
DID YOU SPEAK TO HER?
EVENTUALLY, WHEN SHE STARTED TO COME OUT OF HER FUGUE STATE. THE EXPERIMENT WAS OVER. I DIDN'T WANT TO HURT HER.
WHAT DID SHE SAY?
NOTHING.
NOTHING?
NOTHING AT ALL. FOR A LONG TIME I DON'T BELIEVE SHE WAS EVEN AWARE OF MY PRESENCE IN THE ROOM. THEN I COOKED SOME POTATOES, WHICH SHE ATE.
SHE DIDN'T TRY AND CALL THE POLICE?
NO, SHE KNEW WHAT I'D DONE, AND WHY I'D DONE IT. IT WASN'T PRE-PLANNED, BUT WE'D TALKED ABOUT SUCH EXPERIMENTS, IN ABSTRACT CONVERSATIONS. SHE HADN'T COME TO ANY HARM, YOU SEE. SHE'D LOST A BIT OF WEIGHT PERHAPS, BUT THAT WAS ABOUT ALL.
WHERE IS SHE NOW?
SHE LEFT THE DAY AFTER. I DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE WENT.
AND WHAT DID IT ALL PROVE?
NOTHING AT ALL, PERHAPS. BUT IT MADE AN INTERESTING START TO MY INVESTIGATIONS.

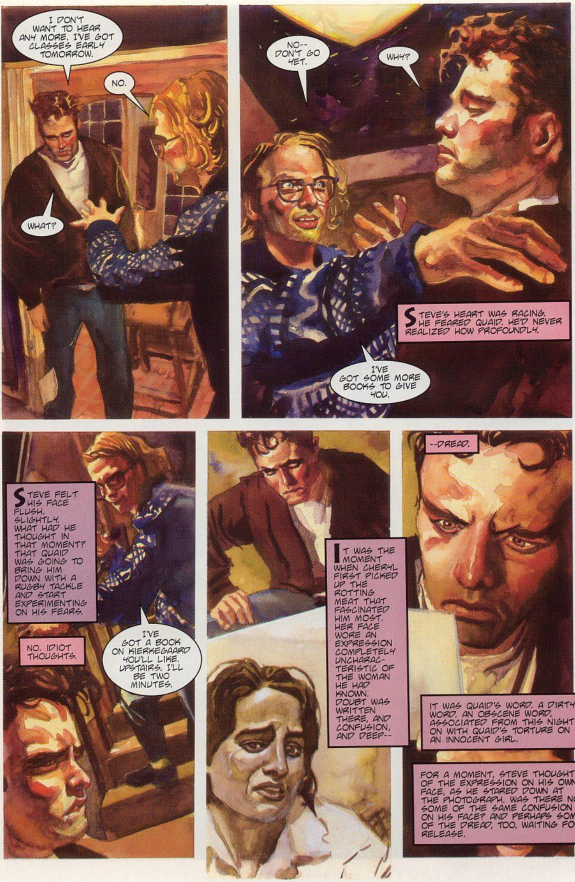

START? THIS WAS ONLY A *START?!*
STEPHEN--
YOU COULD HAVE KILLED HER!
NO.
SHE COULD HAVE LOST HER MIND. BEEN UNBALANCED *PERMANENTLY!*

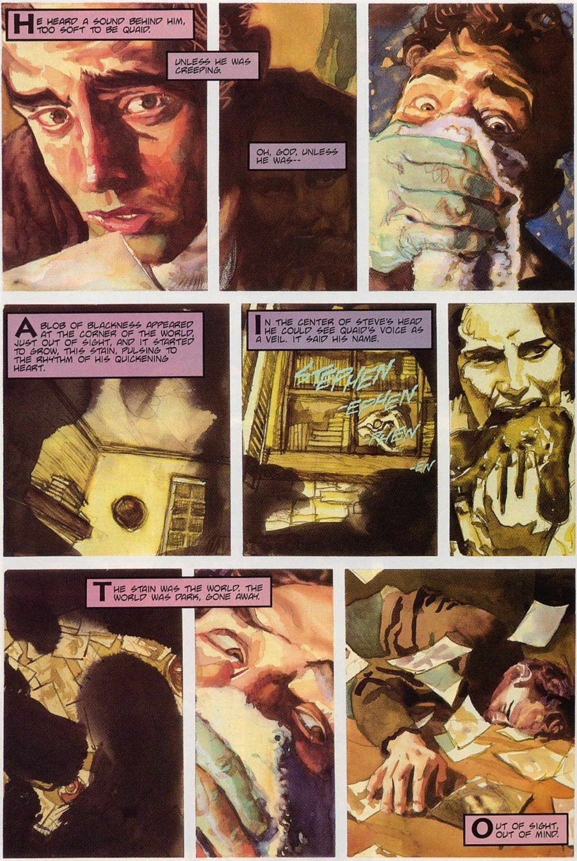

POSSIBLY. BUT UNLIKELY. SHE WAS A STRONG-WILLED WOMAN.
BUT *YOU* BROKE HER!
YES. IT WAS A JOURNEY SHE WAS READY TO TAKE. WE'D TALKED OF GOING TO FACE HER FEAR. SO HERE WAS I, ARRANGING FOR CHERYL TO DO JUST THAT. NOTHING MUCH REALLY.

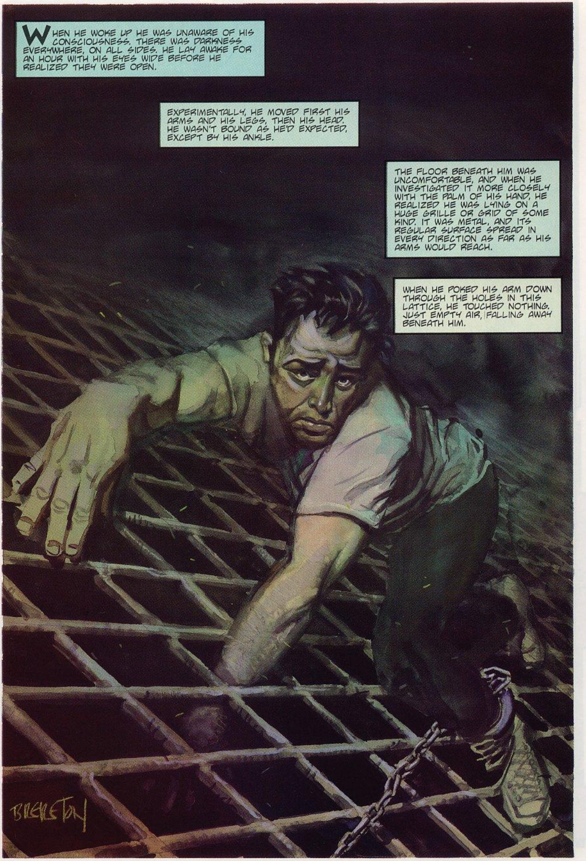

YOU FORCED HER TO DO IT. SHE WOULDN'T HAVE GONE OTHERWISE.
TRUE. IT WAS AN EDUCATION FOR HER.
SO NOW YOU'RE A *TEACHER?*
STEVE WISHED HE'D BEEN ABLE TO KEEP THE SARCASM OUT OF HIS VOICE. BUT IT WAS THERE. SARCASM, ANGER, AND A LITTLE FEAR.

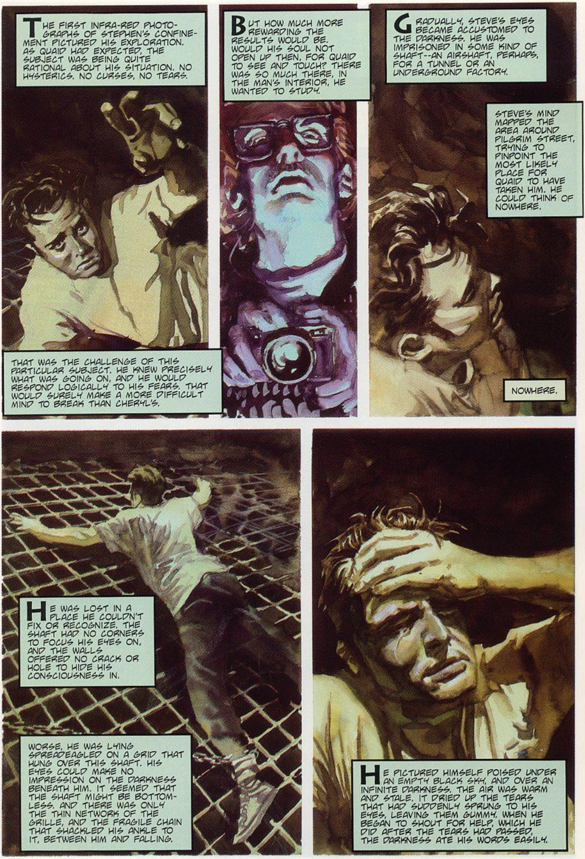

YES, I'M THE TEACHER. I'M TEACHING PEOPLE DREAD.

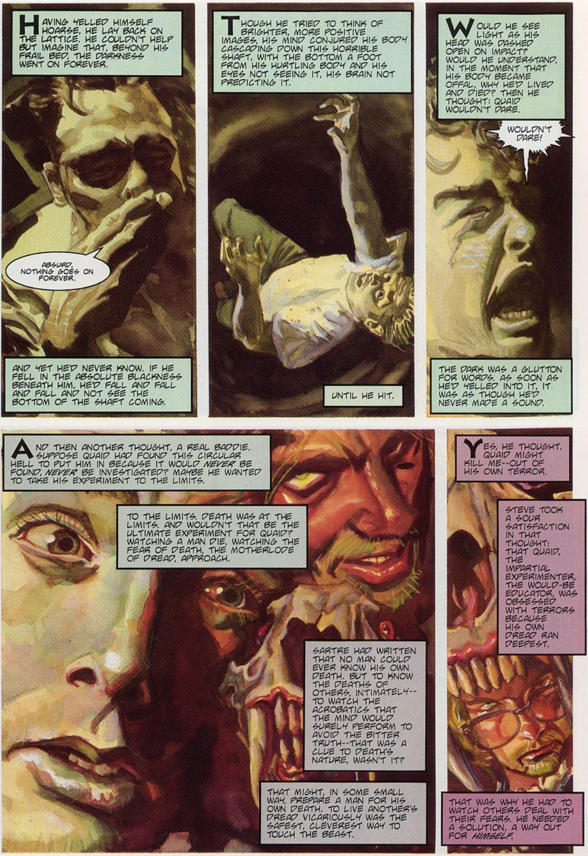

ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH WHAT YOU'VE TAUGHT?
AND LEARNED, STEVE. I'VE LEARNED, TOO. IT'S A VERY EXCITING PROSPECT--A WORLD OF FEARS TO INVESTIGATE. ESPECIALLY WITH INTELLIGENT SUBJECTS. EVEN IN THE FACE OF RATIONALIZATION--

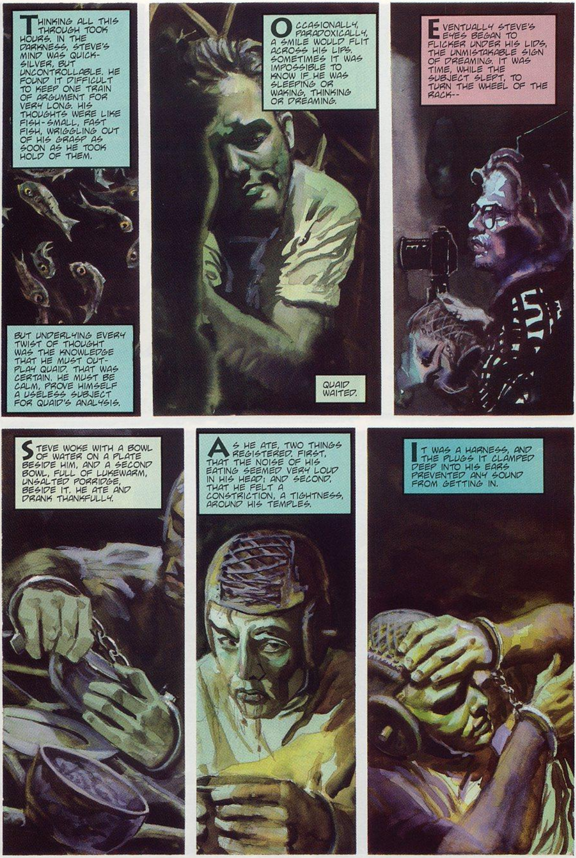

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE. I'VE GOT CLASSES EARLY TOMORROW.
NO.
WHAT?
NO-- DON'T GO YET.
WHY?
STEVE'S HEART WAS RACING. HE FEARED QUAID. HE'D NEVER REALIZED HOW PROFOUNDLY.
I'VE GOT SOME MORE BOOKS TO GIVE YOU.
STEVE FELT HIS FACE FLUSH. SLIGHTLY. WHAT HAD HE THOUGHT IN THAT MOMENT? THAT QUAID WAS GOING TO BRING HIM DOWN WITH A RUGBY TACKLE AND START EXPERIMENTING ON HIS FEARS.
NO. IDIOT THOUGHTS.
I'VE GOT A BOOK ON KIERKEGAARD YOU'LL LIKE. UPSTAIRS. I'LL BE TWO MINUTES.
IT WAS THE MOMENT WHEN CHERYL FIRST PICKED UP THE ROTTING MEAT THAT FASCINATED HIM MOST. HER FACE WORE AN EXPRESSION COMPLETELY UNCHARACTERISTIC OF THE WOMAN HE HAD KNOWN. DOUBT WAS WRITTEN THERE, AND CONFUSION, AND DEEP--
--DREAD.
IT WAS QUAID'S WORD. A DIRTY WORD. AN OBSCENE WORD, ASSOCIATED FROM THIS NIGHT ON WITH QUAID'S TORTURE ON AN INNOCENT GIRL.
FOR A MOMENT, STEVE THOUGHT OF THE EXPRESSION ON HIS OWN FACE, AS HE STARED DOWN AT THE PHOTOGRAPH. WAS THERE NOT SOME OF THE SAME CONFUSION ON HIS FACE? AND PERHAPS SOME OF THE DREAD, TOO, WAITING FOR RELEASE.

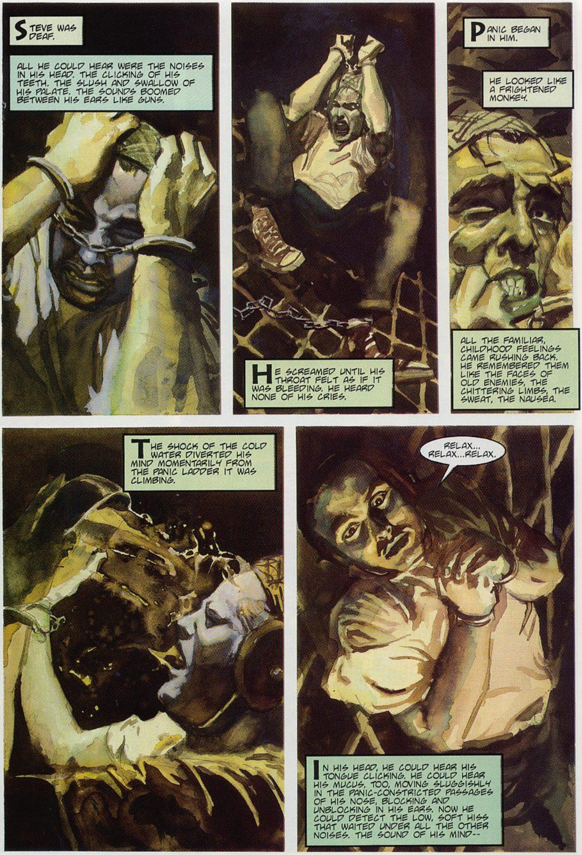

HE HEARD A SOUND BEHIND HIM, TOO SOFT TO BE QUAID.
UNLESS HE WAS CREEPING.
OH, GOD, UNLESS HE WAS--
A BLOB OF BLACKNESS APPEARED AT THE CORNER OF THE WORLD, JUST OUT OF SIGHT, AND IT STARTED TO GROW, THIS STAIN, PULSING TO THE RHYTHM OF HIS QUICKENING HEART.
IN THE CENTER OF STEVE'S HEAD HE COULD SEE QUAID'S VOICE AS A VEIL. IT SAID HIS NAME.
STEPHEN
-EPHEN
-PHEN
-EN
THE STAIN WAS THE WORLD. THE WORLD WAS DARK, GONE AWAY.
OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND.

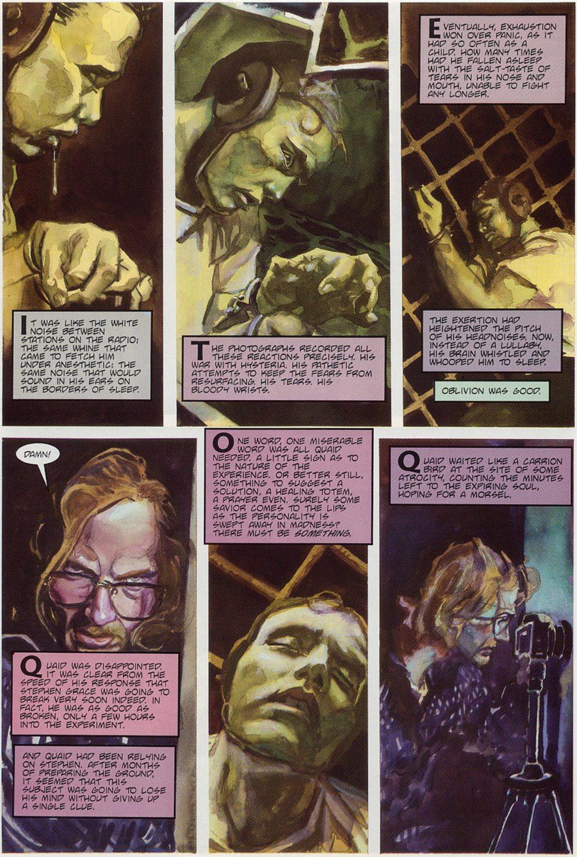

WHEN HE WOKE UP HE WAS UNAWARE OF HIS CONSCIOUSNESS. THERE WAS DARKNESS EVERYWHERE, ON ALL SIDES. HE LAY AWAKE FOR AN HOUR WITH HIS EYES WIDE BEFORE HE REALIZED THEY WERE OPEN.
EXPERIMENTALLY, HE MOVED FIRST HIS ARMS AND HIS LEGS, THEN HIS HEAD. HE WASN'T BOUND AS HE'D EXPECTED, EXCEPT BY HIS ANKLE.
THE FLOOR BENEATH HIM WAS UNCOMFORTABLE, AND WHEN HE INVESTIGATED IT MORE CLOSELY WITH THE PALM OF HIS HAND, HE REALIZED HE WAS LYING ON A HUGE GRILLE OR GRID OF SOME KIND. IT WAS METAL, AND ITS REGULAR SURFACE SPREAD IN EVERY DIRECTION AS FAR AS HIS ARMS WOULD REACH.
WHEN HE POKED HIS ARM DOWN THROUGH THE HOLES IN THIS LATTICE, HE TOUCHED NOTHING. JUST EMPTY AIR, FALLING AWAY BENEATH HIM.
BRERETON

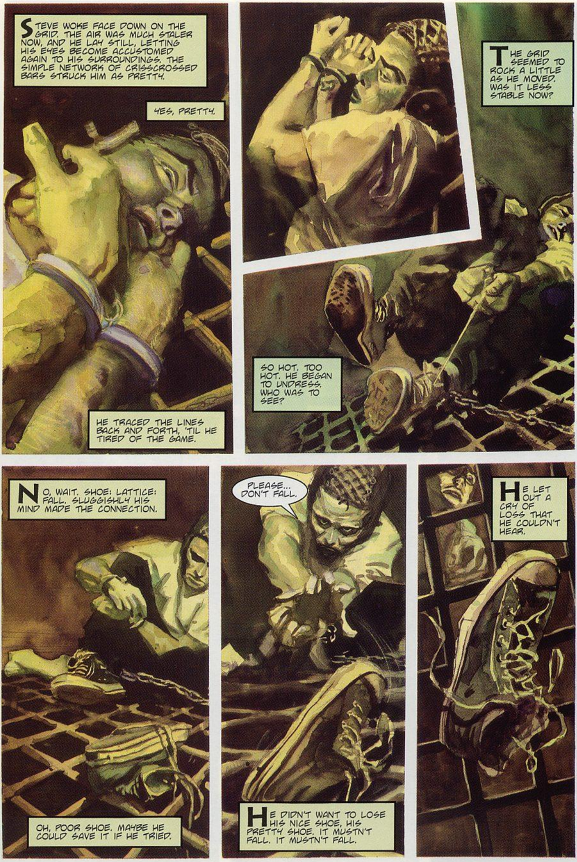

THE FIRST INFRA-RED PHOTOGRAPHS OF STEPHEN'S CONFINEMENT PICTURED HIS EXPLORATION. AS QUAID HAD EXPECTED, THE SUBJECT WAS BEING QUITE RATIONAL ABOUT HIS SITUATION. NO HYSTERICS. NO CURSES, NO TEARS.
THAT WAS THE CHALLENGE OF THIS PARTICULAR SUBJECT. HE KNEW PRECISELY WHAT WAS GOING ON, AND HE WOULD RESPOND LOGICALLY TO HIS FEARS. THAT WOULD SURELY MAKE A MORE DIFFICULT MIND TO BREAK THAN CHERYL'S.
BUT HOW MUCH MORE REWARDING THE RESULTS WOULD BE. WOULD HIS SOUL NOT OPEN UP THEN, FOR QUAID TO SEE AND TOUCH? THERE WAS SO MUCH THERE, IN THE MAN'S INTERIOR, HE WANTED TO STUDY.
GRADUALLY, STEVE'S EYES BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO THE DARKNESS. HE WAS IMPRISONED IN SOME KIND OF SHAFT--AN AIRSHAFT, PERHAPS, FOR A TUNNEL OR AN UNDERGROUND FACTORY.
STEVE'S MIND MAPPED THE AREA AROUND PILGRIM STREET, TRYING TO PINPOINT THE MOST LIKELY PLACE FOR QUAID TO HAVE TAKEN HIM. HE COULD THINK OF NOWHERE.
NOWHERE.
HE WAS LOST IN A PLACE HE COULDN'T FIX OR RECOGNIZE. THE SHAFT HAD NO CORNERS TO FOCUS HIS EYES ON, AND THE WALLS OFFERED NO CRACK OR HOLE TO HIDE HIS CONSCIOUSNESS IN.
WORSE, HE WAS LYING SPREADEAGLED ON A GRID THAT HUNG OVER THIS SHAFT. HIS EYES COULD MAKE NO IMPRESSION ON THE DARKNESS BENEATH HIM. IT SEEMED THAT THE SHAFT MIGHT BE BOTTOMLESS. AND THERE WAS ONLY THE THIN NETWORK OF THE GRILLE, AND THE FRAGILE CHAIN THAT SHACKLED HIS ANKLE TO IT, BETWEEN HIM AND FALLING.
HE PICTURED HIMSELF POISED UNDER AN EMPTY BLACK SKY, AND OVER AN INFINITE DARKNESS. THE AIR WAS WARM AND STALE. IT DRIED UP THE TEARS THAT HAD SUDDENLY SPRUNG TO HIS EYES, LEAVING THEM GUMMY. WHEN HE BEGAN TO SHOUT FOR HELP, WHICH HE DID AFTER THE TEARS HAD PASSED, THE DARKNESS ATE HIS WORDS EASILY.

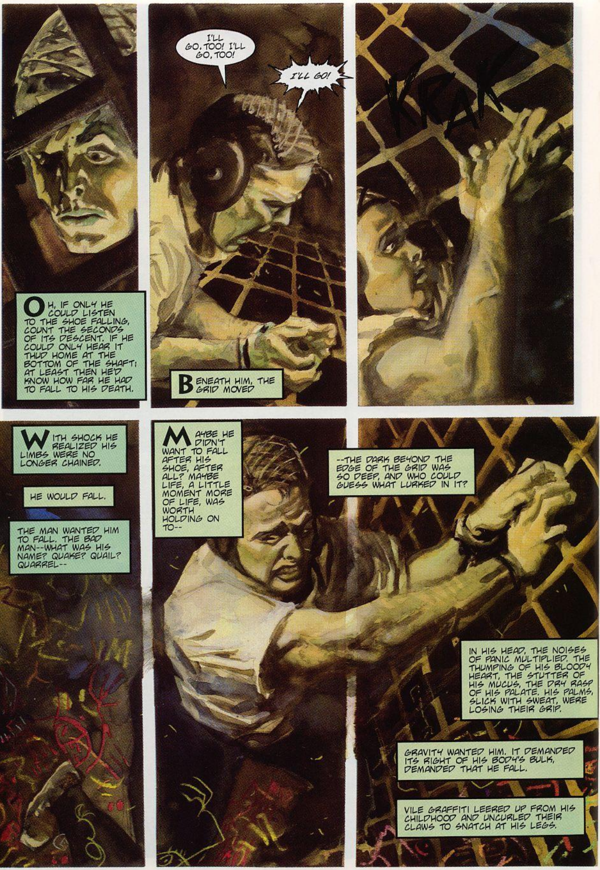

HAVING YELLED HIMSELF HOARSE, HE LAY BACK ON THE LATTICE. HE COULDN'T HELP BUT IMAGINE THAT, BEYOND HIS FRAIL BED, THE DARKNESS WENT ON FOREVER.
ABSURD, NOTHING GOES ON FOREVER.
AND YET HE'D NEVER KNOW. IF HE FELL IN THE ABSOLUTE BLACKNESS BENEATH HIM, HE'D FALL AND FALL AND FALL AND NOT SEE THE BOTTOM OF THE SHAFT COMING.
THOUGH HE TRIED TO THINK OF BRIGHTER, MORE POSITIVE IMAGES, HIS MIND CONJURED HIS BODY CASCADING DOWN THIS HORRIBLE SHAFT, WITH THE BOTTOM A FOOT FROM HIS HURTLING BODY AND HIS EYES NOT SEEING IT, HIS BRAIN NOT PREDICTING IT.
UNTIL HE HIT.
WOULD HE SEE LIGHT AS HIS HEAD WAS DASHED OPEN ON IMPACT? WOULD HE UNDERSTAND, IN THE MOMENT THAT HIS BODY BECAME OFFAL, WHY HE'D LIVED AND DIED? THEN HE THOUGHT: QUAID WOULDN'T DARE.
WOULDN'T DARE!
THE DARK WAS A GLUTTON FOR WORDS. AS SOON AS HE'D YELLED INTO IT, IT WAS AS THOUGH HE'D NEVER MADE A SOUND.
AND THEN ANOTHER THOUGHT, A REAL BADDIE. SUPPOSE QUAID HAD FOUND THIS CIRCULAR HELL TO PUT HIM IN BECAUSE IT WOULD *NEVER* BE FOUND, *NEVER* BE INVESTIGATED? MAYBE HE WANTED TO TAKE HIS EXPERIMENT TO THE LIMITS.
TO THE LIMITS. DEATH WAS AT THE LIMITS. AND WOULDN'T THAT BE THE ULTIMATE EXPERIMENT FOR QUAID? WATCHING A MAN DIE, WATCHING THE FEAR OF DEATH, THE MOTHERLODE OF DREAD, APPROACH.
SARTRE HAD WRITTEN THAT NO MAN COULD EVER KNOW HIS OWN DEATH. BUT TO KNOW THE DEATHS OF OTHERS, INTIMATELY--TO WATCH THE ACROBATICS THAT THE MIND WOULD SURELY PERFORM TO AVOID THE BITTER TRUTH--THAT WAS A CLUE TO DEATH'S NATURE, WASN'T IT?
THAT MIGHT, IN SOME SMALL WAY, PREPARE A MAN FOR HIS OWN DEATH. TO LIVE ANOTHER'S DREAD VICARIOUSLY WAS THE SAFEST, CLEVEREST WAY TO TOUCH THE BEAST.
YES, HE THOUGHT. QUAID MIGHT KILL ME--OUT OF HIS OWN TERROR.
STEVE TOOK A SOUR SATISFACTION IN THAT THOUGHT: THAT QUAID, THE IMPARTIAL EXPERIMENTER, THE WOULD-BE EDUCATOR, WAS OBSESSED WITH TERRORS BECAUSE HIS OWN DREAD RAN DEEPEST.
THAT WAS WHY HE HAD TO WATCH OTHERS DEAL WITH THEIR FEARS. HE NEEDED A SOLUTION, A WAY OUT FOR *HIMSELF*.

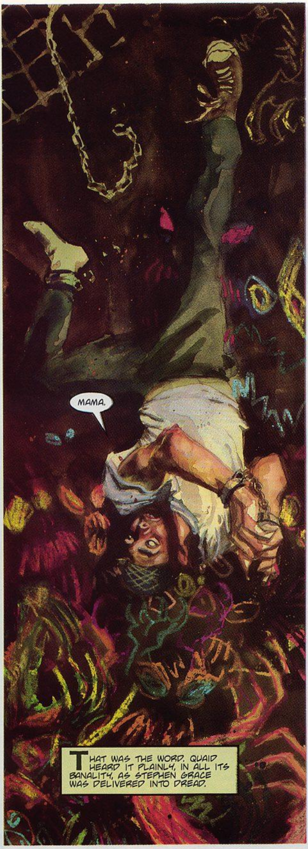

THINKING ALL THIS THROUGH TOOK HOURS. IN THE DARKNESS, STEVE'S MIND WAS QUICKSILVER, BUT UNCONTROLLABLE. HE FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO KEEP ONE TRAIN OF ARGUMENT FOR VERY LONG. HIS THOUGHTS WERE LIKE FISH-SMALL, FAST FISH, WRIGGLING OUT OF HIS GRASP AS SOON AS HE TOOK HOLD OF THEM.
BUT UNDERLYING EVERY TWIST OF THOUGHT WAS THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE MUST OUTPLAY QUAID. THAT WAS CERTAIN. HE MUST BE CALM, PROVE HIMSELF A USELESS SUBJECT FOR QUAID'S ANALYSIS.
OCCASIONALLY, PARADOXICALLY, A SMILE WOULD FLIT ACROSS HIS LIPS. SOMETIMES IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW IF HE WAS SLEEPING OR WAKING, THINKING OR DREAMING.
QUAID WAITED.
EVENTUALLY STEVE'S EYES BEGAN TO FLICKER UNDER HIS LIDS, THE UNMISTAKABLE SIGN OF DREAMING. IT WAS TIME, WHILE THE SUBJECT SLEPT, TO TURN THE WHEEL OF THE RACK--
STEVE WOKE WITH A BOWL OF WATER ON A PLATE BESIDE HIM, AND A SECOND BOWL, FULL OF LUKEWARM, UNSALTED PORRIDGE, BESIDE IT. HE ATE AND DRANK THANKFULLY.
AS HE ATE, TWO THINGS REGISTERED. FIRST, THAT THE NOISE OF HIS EATING SEEMED VERY LOUD IN HIS HEAD; AND SECOND, THAT HE FELT A CONSTRICTION, A TIGHTNESS, AROUND HIS TEMPLES.
IT WAS A HARNESS, AND THE PLUGS IT CLAMPED DEEP INTO HIS EARS PREVENTED ANY SOUND FROM GETTING IN.

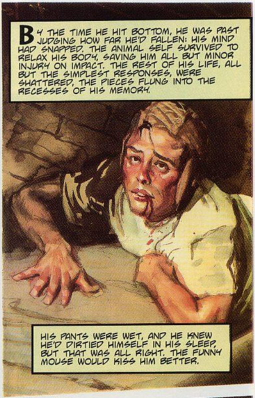

STEVE WAS DEAF.
ALL HE COULD HEAR WERE THE NOISES IN HIS HEAD. THE CLICKING OF HIS TEETH. THE SLUSH AND SWALLOW OF HIS PALATE. THE SOUNDS BOOMED BETWEEN HIS EARS LIKE GUNS.
HE SCREAMED UNTIL HIS THROAT FELT AS IF IT WAS BLEEDING. HE HEARD NONE OF HIS CRIES.
PANIC BEGAN IN HIM.
HE LOOKED LIKE A FRIGHTENED MONKEY.
ALL THE FAMILIAR, CHILDHOOD FEELINGS CAME RUSHING BACK. HE REMEMBERED THEM LIKE THE FACES OF OLD ENEMIES, THE CHITTERING LIMBS, THE SWEAT, THE NAUSEA.
THE SHOCK OF THE COLD WATER DIVERTED HIS MIND MOMENTARILY FROM THE PANIC LADDER IT WAS CLIMBING.
RELAX... RELAX...RELAX.
IN HIS HEAD, HE COULD HEAR HIS TONGUE CLICKING. HE COULD HEAR HIS MUCUS, TOO, MOVING SLUGGISHLY IN THE PANIC-CONSTRICTED PASSAGES OF HIS NOSE, BLOCKING AND UNBLOCKING IN HIS EARS. NOW HE COULD DETECT THE LOW, SOFT HISS THAT WAITED UNDER ALL THE OTHER NOISES. THE SOUND OF HIS MIND--

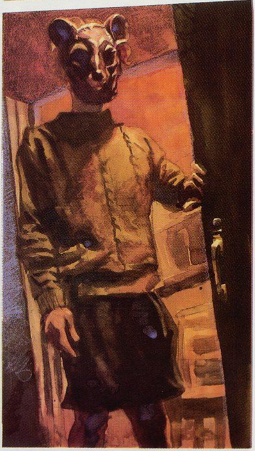

IT WAS LIKE THE WHITE NOISE BETWEEN STATIONS ON THE RADIO; THE SAME WHINE THAT CAME TO FETCH HIM UNDER ANESTHETIC; THE SAME NOISE THAT WOULD SOUND IN HIS EARS ON THE BORDERS OF SLEEP.
THE PHOTOGRAPHS RECORDED ALL THESE REACTIONS PRECISELY. HIS WAR WITH HYSTERIA. HIS PATHETIC ATTEMPTS TO KEEP THE FEARS FROM RESURFACING. HIS TEARS. HIS BLOODY WRISTS.
EVENTUALLY, EXHAUSTION WON OVER PANIC, AS IT HAD SO OFTEN AS A CHILD. HOW MANY TIMES HAD HE FALLEN ASLEEP WITH THE SALT-TASTE OF TEARS IN HIS NOSE AND MOUTH, UNABLE TO FIGHT ANY LONGER.
THE EXERTION HAD HEIGHTENED THE PITCH OF HIS HEADNOISES. NOW, INSTEAD OF A LULLABY, HIS BRAIN WHISTLED AND WHOOPED HIM TO SLEEP.
OBLIVION WAS GOOD.
DAMN!
QUAID WAS DISAPPOINTED. IT WAS CLEAR FROM THE SPEED OF HIS RESPONSE THAT STEPHEN GRACE WAS GOING TO BREAK VERY SOON INDEED. IN FACT, HE WAS AS GOOD AS BROKEN, ONLY A FEW HOURS INTO THE EXPERIMENT.
AND QUAID HAD BEEN RELYING ON STEPHEN. AFTER MONTHS OF PREPARING THE GROUND, IT SEEMED THAT THIS SUBJECT WAS GOING TO LOSE HIS MIND WITHOUT GIVING UP A SINGLE CLUE.
ONE WORD, ONE MISERABLE WORD WAS ALL QUAID NEEDED. A LITTLE SIGN AS TO THE NATURE OF THE EXPERIENCE. OR BETTER STILL, SOMETHING TO SUGGEST A SOLUTION, A HEALING TOTEM, A PRAYER EVEN. SURELY SOME SAVIOR COMES TO THE LIPS AS THE PERSONALITY IS SWEPT AWAY IN MADNESS? THERE MUST BE *SOMETHING*.
QUAID WAITED LIKE A CARRION BIRD AT THE SITE OF SOME ATROCITY, COUNTING THE MINUTES LEFT TO THE EXPIRING SOUL, HOPING FOR A MORSEL.

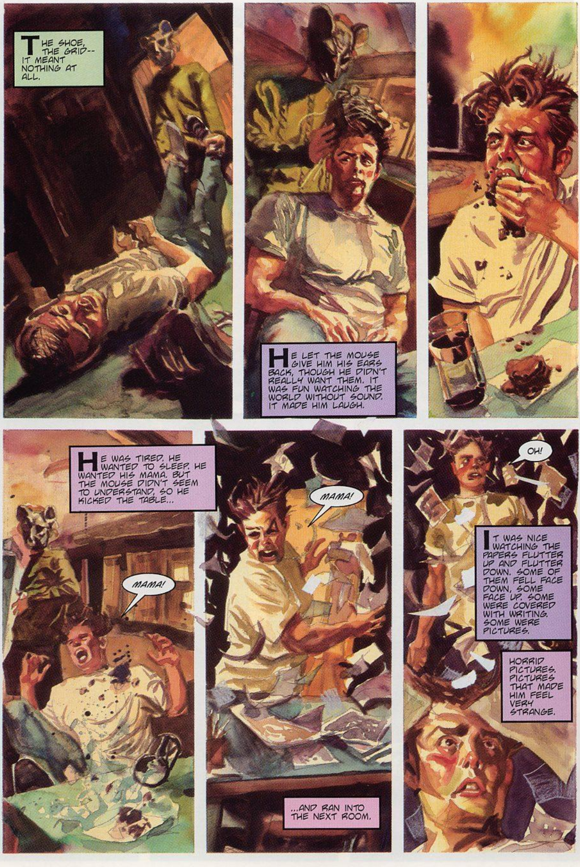

STEVE WOKE FACE DOWN ON THE GRID. THE AIR WAS MUCH STALER NOW, AND HE LAY STILL, LETTING HIS EYES BECOME ACCUSTOMED AGAIN TO HIS SURROUNDINGS. THE SIMPLE NETWORK OF CRISSCROSSED BARS STRUCK HIM AS PRETTY.
YES, PRETTY.
HE TRACED THE LINES BACK AND FORTH, 'TIL HE TIRED OF THE GAME.
THE GRID SEEMED TO ROCK A LITTLE AS HE MOVED. WAS IT LESS STABLE NOW?
SO HOT. TOO HOT. HE BEGAN TO UNDRESS. WHO WAS TO SEE?
NO, WAIT. SHOE: LATTICE: FALL. SLUGGISHLY HIS MIND MADE THE CONNECTION.
OH, POOR SHOE. MAYBE HE COULD SAVE IT IF HE TRIED.
PLEASE... DON'T FALL.
HE DIDN'T WANT TO LOSE HIS NICE SHOE, HIS PRETTY SHOE. IT MUSTN'T FALL. IT MUSTN'T FALL.
HE LET OUT A CRY OF LOSS THAT HE COULDN'T HEAR.

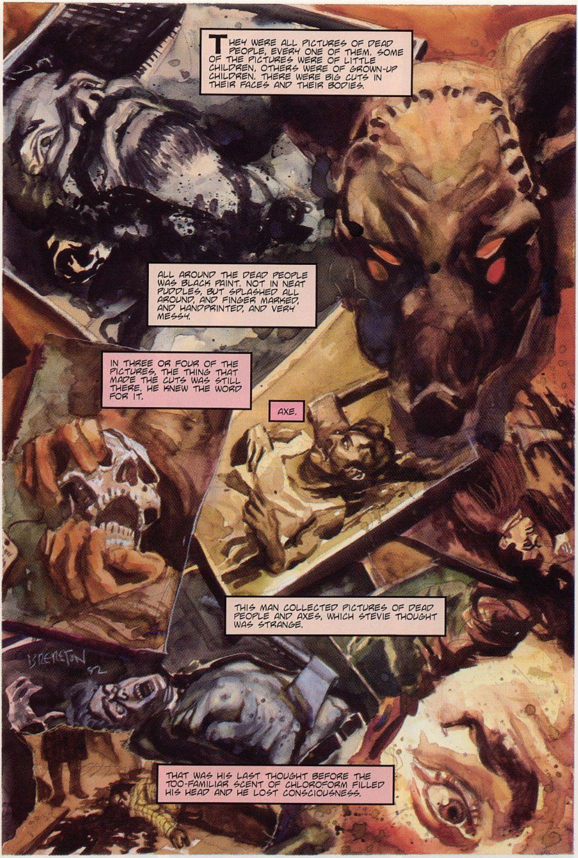

OH, IF ONLY HE COULD LISTEN TO THE SHOE FALLING, COUNT THE SECONDS OF ITS DESCENT. IF HE COULD ONLY HEAR IT THUD HOME AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SHAFT; AT LEAST THEN HE'D KNOW HOW FAR HE HAD TO FALL TO HIS DEATH.
I'LL GO, TOO! I'LL GO, TOO!
I'LL GO!
BENEATH HIM, THE GRID MOVED
KRAK
WITH SHOCK HE REALIZED HIS LIMBS WERE NO LONGER CHAINED.
HE WOULD FALL.
THE MAN WANTED HIM TO FALL. THE BAD MAN--WHAT WAS HIS NAME? QUAKE? QUAIL? QUARREL--
MAYBE HE DIDN'T WANT TO FALL AFTER HIS SHOE, AFTER ALL? MAYBE LIFE, A LITTLE MOMENT MORE OF LIFE, WAS WORTH HOLDING ON TO--
--THE DARK BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE GRID WAS SO DEEP, AND WHO COULD GUESS WHAT LURKED IN IT?
IN HIS HEAD, THE NOISES OF PANIC MULTIPLIED. THE THUMPING OF HIS BLOODY HEART, THE STUTTER OF HIS MUCUS, THE DRY RASP OF HIS PALATE. HIS PALMS, SLICK WITH SWEAT, WERE LOSING THEIR GRIP.
GRAVITY WANTED HIM. IT DEMANDED ITS RIGHT OF HIS BODY'S BULK, DEMANDED THAT HE FALL.
VILE GRAFFITI LEERED UP FROM HIS CHILDHOOD AND UNCURLED THEIR CLAWS TO SNATCH AT HIS LEGS.

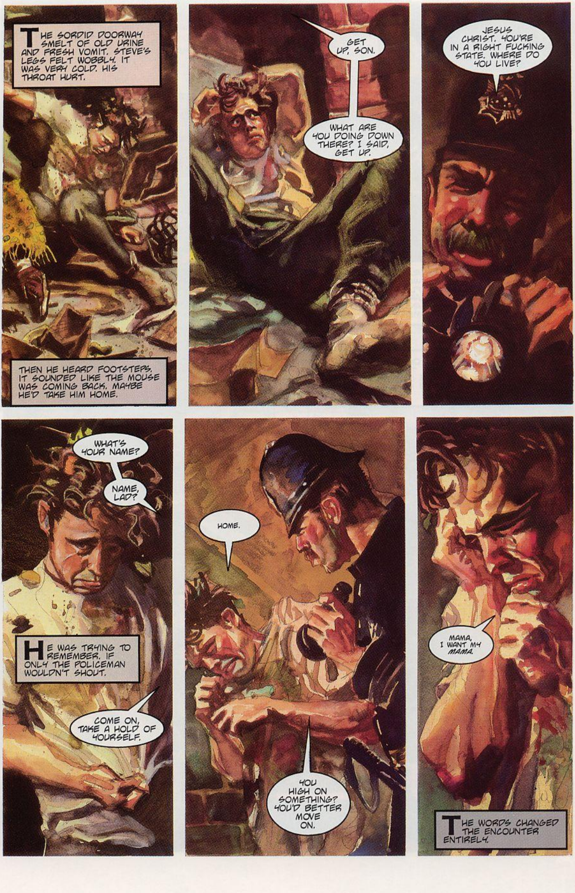

MAMA.
THAT WAS THE WORD. QUAID HEARD IT PLAINLY, IN ALL ITS BANALITY, AS STEPHEN GRACE WAS DELIVERED INTO DREAD.

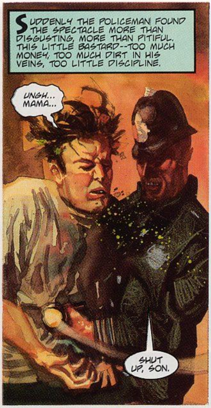

BY THE TIME HE HIT BOTTOM, HE WAS PAST JUDGING HOW FAR HE'D FALLEN: HIS MIND HAD SNAPPED. THE ANIMAL SELF SURVIVED TO RELAX HIS BODY, SAVING HIM ALL BUT MINOR INJURY ON IMPACT. THE REST OF HIS LIFE, ALL BUT THE SIMPLEST RESPONSES, WERE SHATTERED, THE PIECES FLUNG INTO THE RECESSES OF HIS MEMORY.
HIS PANTS WERE WET, AND HE KNEW HE'D DIRTIED HIMSELF IN HIS SLEEP, BUT THAT WAS ALL RIGHT. THE FUNNY MOUSE WOULD KISS HIM BETTER.

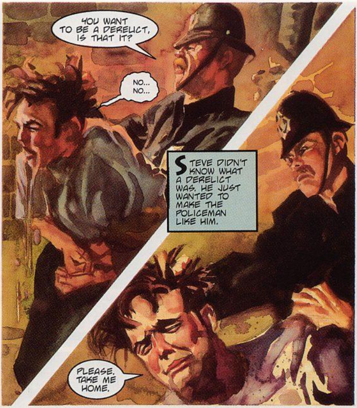


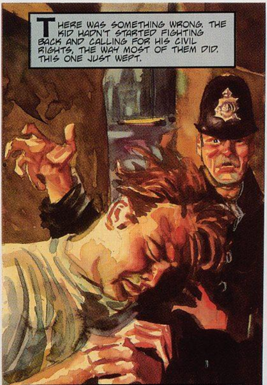

THE SHOE, THE GRID-- IT MEANT NOTHING AT ALL.
HE LET THE MOUSE GIVE HIM HIS EARS BACK, THOUGH HE DIDN'T REALLY WANT THEM. IT WAS FUN WATCHING THE WORLD WITHOUT SOUND. IT MADE HIM LAUGH.
HE WAS TIRED. HE WANTED TO SLEEP. HE WANTED HIS MAMA. BUT THE MOUSE DIDN'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND, SO HE KICKED THE TABLE...
MAMA!
MAMA!
...AND RAN INTO THE NEXT ROOM.
OH!
IT WAS NICE WATCHING THE PAPERS FLUTTER UP AND FLUTTER DOWN. SOME OF THEM FELL FACE DOWN, SOME FACE UP. SOME WERE COVERED WITH WRITING. SOME WERE PICTURES.
HORRID PICTURES. PICTURES THAT MADE HIM FEEL VERY STRANGE.

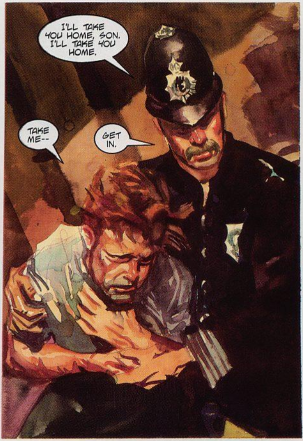

THEY WERE ALL PICTURES OF DEAD PEOPLE, EVERY ONE OF THEM. SOME OF THE PICTURES WERE OF LITTLE CHILDREN, OTHERS WERE OF GROWN-UP CHILDREN. THERE WERE BIG CUTS IN THEIR FACES AND THEIR BODIES.
ALL AROUND THE DEAD PEOPLE WAS BLACK PAINT. NOT IN NEAT PUDDLES, BUT SPLASHED ALL AROUND, AND FINGER MARKED, AND HANDPRINTED, AND VERY MESSY.
IN THREE OR FOUR OF THE PICTURES, THE THING THAT MADE THE CUTS WAS STILL THERE. HE KNEW THE WORD FOR IT.
AXE.
THIS MAN COLLECTED PICTURES OF DEAD PEOPLE AND AXES, WHICH STEVIE THOUGHT WAS STRANGE.
BRERETON 92
THAT WAS HIS LAST THOUGHT BEFORE THE TOO-FAMILIAR SCENT OF CHLOROFORM FILLED HIS HEAD AND HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

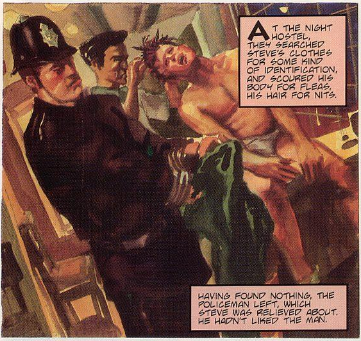

THE SORDID DOORWAY SMELT OF OLD URINE AND FRESH VOMIT. STEVE'S LEGS FELT WOBBLY. IT WAS VERY COLD. HIS THROAT HURT.
THEN HE HEARD FOOTSTEPS. IT SOUNDED LIKE THE MOUSE WAS COMING BACK. MAYBE HE'D TAKE HIM HOME.
GET UP, SON.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING DOWN THERE? I SAID, GET UP.
JESUS CHRIST. YOU'RE IN A RIGHT FUCKING STATE. WHERE DO YOU LIVE?
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
NAME, LAD?
HE WAS TRYING TO REMEMBER. IF ONLY THE POLICEMAN WOULDN'T SHOUT.
COME ON, TAKE A HOLD OF YOURSELF.
HOME.
YOU HIGH ON SOMETHING? YOU'D BETTER MOVE ON.
MAMA, I WANT MY *MAMA*.
THE WORDS CHANGED THE ENCOUNTER ENTIRELY.


SUDDENLY THE POLICEMAN FOUND THE SPECTACLE MORE THAN DISGUSTING, MORE THAN PITIFUL. THIS LITTLE BASTARD--TOO MUCH MONEY, TOO MUCH DIRT IN HIS VEINS, TOO LITTLE DISCIPLINE.
UNGH... MAMA...
SHUT UP, SON.


YOU WANT TO BE A DERELICT, IS THAT IT?
NO... NO...
STEVE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT A DERELICT WAS. HE JUST WANTED TO MAKE THE POLICEMAN LIKE HIM.
PLEASE. TAKE ME HOME.

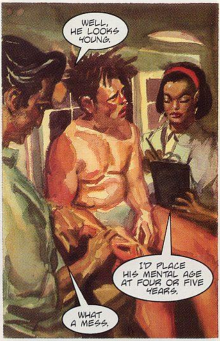

THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG. THE KID HADN'T STARTED FIGHTING BACK AND CALLING FOR HIS CIVIL RIGHTS, THE WAY MOST OF THEM DID. THIS ONE JUST WEPT.
THE POLICEMAN BEGAN TO GET A BAD FEELING ABOUT THE KID. LIKE HE WAS MENTAL OR SOMETHING. AND HE'D BEATEN THE SHIT OUT OF THE LITTLE SNOT.

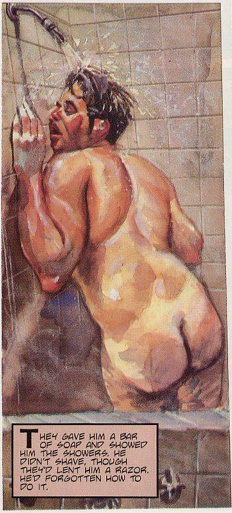

I'LL TAKE YOU HOME, SON. I'LL TAKE YOU HOME.
TAKE ME--
GET IN.



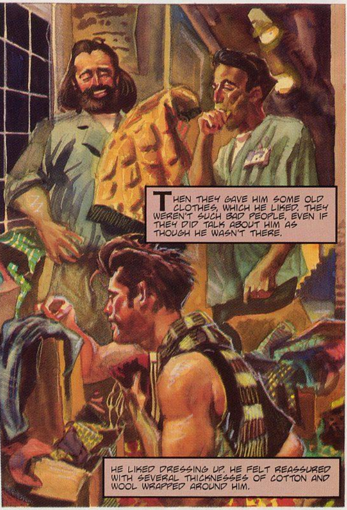
AT THE NIGHT HOSTEL, THEY SEARCHED STEVE'S CLOTHES FOR SOME KIND OF IDENTIFICATION, AND SCOURED HIS BODY FOR FLEAS, HIS HAIR FOR NITS.

HAVING FOUND NOTHING, THE POLICEMAN LEFT, WHICH STEVE WAS RELIEVED ABOUT. HE HADN'T LIKED THE MAN.


WELL, HE LOOKS YOUNG.
I'D PLACE HIS MENTAL AGE AT FOUR OR FIVE YEARS.
WHAT A MESS.

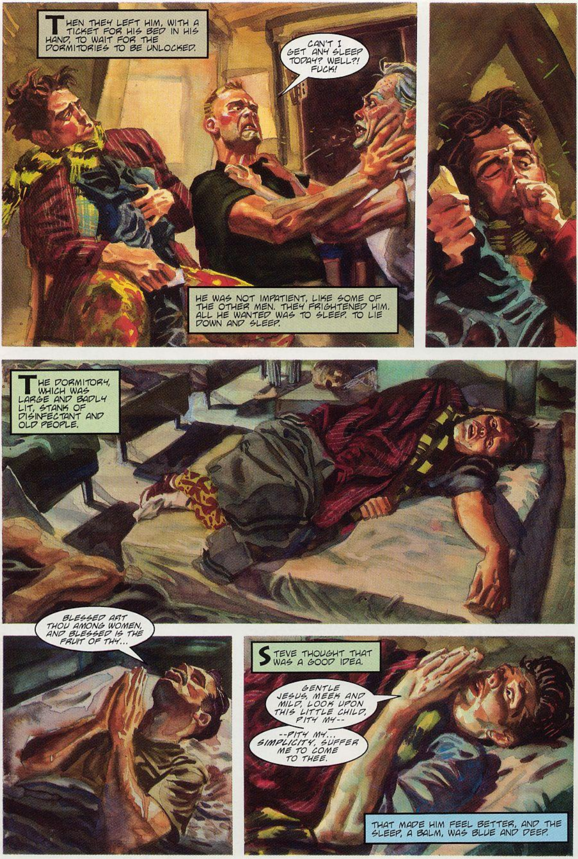


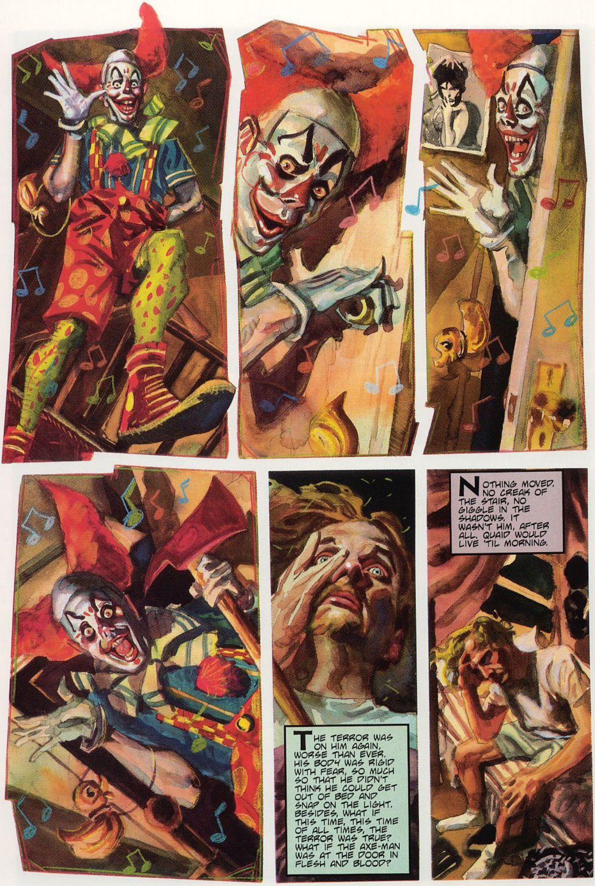
THEY GAVE HIM A BAR OF SOAP AND SHOWED HIM THE SHOWERS. HE DIDN'T SHAVE, THOUGH THEY'D LENT HIM A RAZOR. HE'D FORGOTTEN HOW TO DO IT.

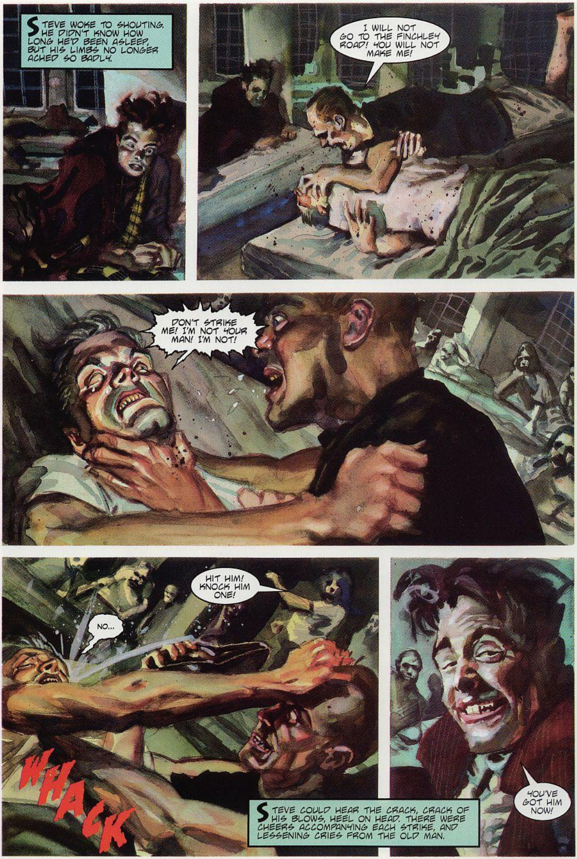


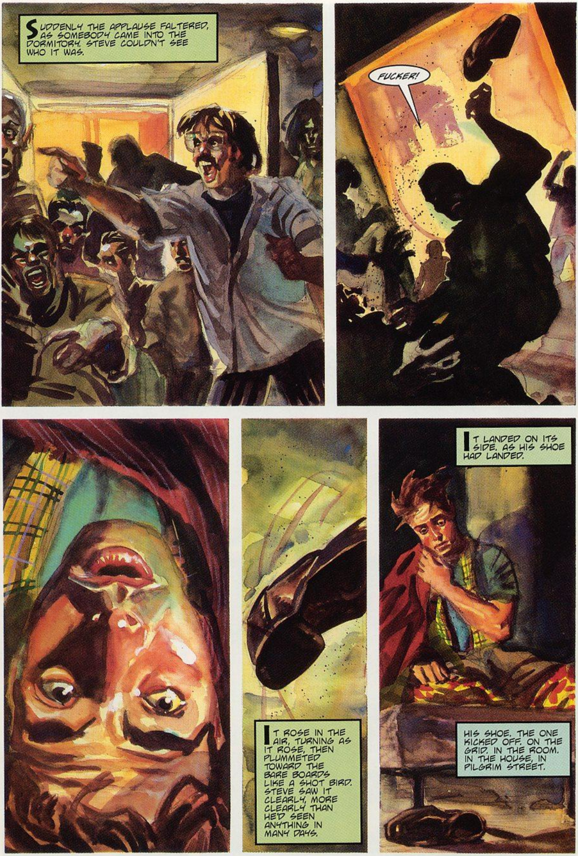
THEN THEY GAVE HIM SOME OLD CLOTHES, WHICH HE LIKED. THEY WEREN'T SUCH BAD PEOPLE, EVEN IF THEY DID TALK ABOUT HIM AS THOUGH HE WASN'T THERE.

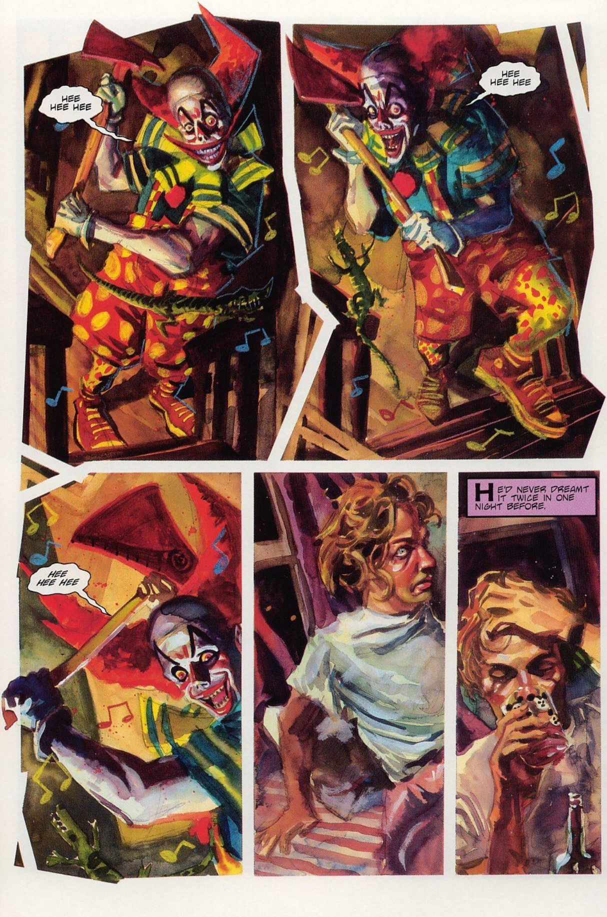
HE LIKED DRESSING UP. HE FELT REASSURED WITH SEVERAL THICKNESSES OF COTTON AND WOOL WRAPPED AROUND HIM.

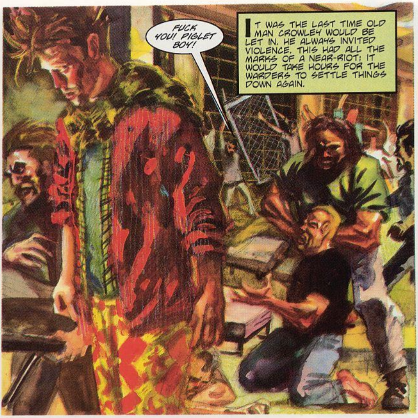

THEN THEY LEFT HIM, WITH A TICKET FOR HIS BED IN HIS HAND, TO WAIT FOR THE DORMITORIES TO BE UNLOCKED.
CAN'T I GET ANY SLEEP TODAY? WELL?! FUCK!
HE WAS NOT IMPATIENT, LIKE SOME OF THE OTHER MEN. THEY FRIGHTENED HIM. ALL HE WANTED WAS TO SLEEP. TO LIE DOWN AND SLEEP.
THE DORMITORY, WHICH WAS LARGE AND BADLY LIT, STANK OF DISINFECTANT AND OLD PEOPLE.
BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN, AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY...
STEVE THOUGHT THAT WAS A GOOD IDEA.
GENTLE JESUS, MEEK AND MILD, LOOK UPON THIS LITTLE CHILD, PITY MY--
--PITY MY... SIMPLICITY, SUFFER ME TO COME TO THEE.
THAT MADE HIM FEEL BETTER, AND THE SLEEP, A BALM, WAS BLUE AND DEEP.

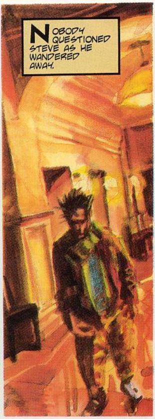

THE TERROR WAS ON HIM AGAIN, WORSE THAN EVER. HIS BODY WAS RIGID WITH FEAR, SO MUCH SO THAT HE DIDN'T THINK HE COULD GET OUT OF BED AND SNAP ON THE LIGHT. BESIDES, WHAT IF THIS TIME, THIS TIME OF ALL TIMES, THE TERROR WAS TRUE? WHAT IF THE AXE-MAN WAS AT THE DOOR IN FLESH AND BLOOD?
NOTHING MOVED. NO CREAK OF THE STAIR, NO GIGGLE IN THE SHADOWS. IT WASN'T HIM, AFTER ALL. QUAID WOULD LIVE 'TIL MORNING.

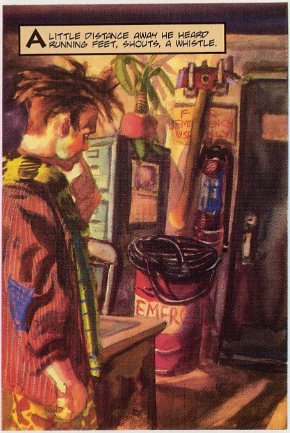

STEVE WOKE TO SHOUTING. HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW LONG HE'D BEEN ASLEEP, BUT HIS LIMBS NO LONGER ACHED SO BADLY.
I WILL NOT GO TO THE FINCHLEY ROAD! YOU WILL NOT MAKE ME!
DON'T STRIKE ME! I'M NOT YOUR MAN! I'M NOT!
HIT HIM! KNOCK HIM ONE!
NO...
WHACK
STEVE COULD HEAR THE CRACK, CRACK OF HIS BLOWS, HEEL ON HEAD. THERE WERE CHEERS ACCOMPANYING EACH STRIKE, AND LESSENING CRIES FROM THE OLD MAN.
YOU'VE GOT HIM NOW!

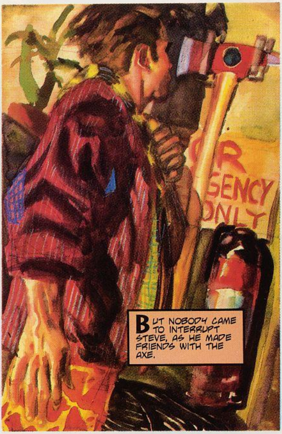

SUDDENLY THE APPLAUSE FALTERED, AS SOMEBODY CAME INTO THE DORMITORY. STEVE COULDN'T SEE WHO IT WAS.
FUCKER!
IT ROSE IN THE AIR, TURNING AS IT ROSE, THEN PLUMMETED TOWARD THE BARE BOARDS LIKE A SHOT BIRD. STEVE SAW IT CLEARLY, MORE CLEARLY THAN HE'D SEEN ANYTHING IN MANY DAYS.
IT LANDED ON ITS SIDE, AS HIS SHOE HAD LANDED.
HIS SHOE. THE ONE KICKED OFF, ON THE GRID, IN THE ROOM, IN THE HOUSE, IN PILGRIM STREET.

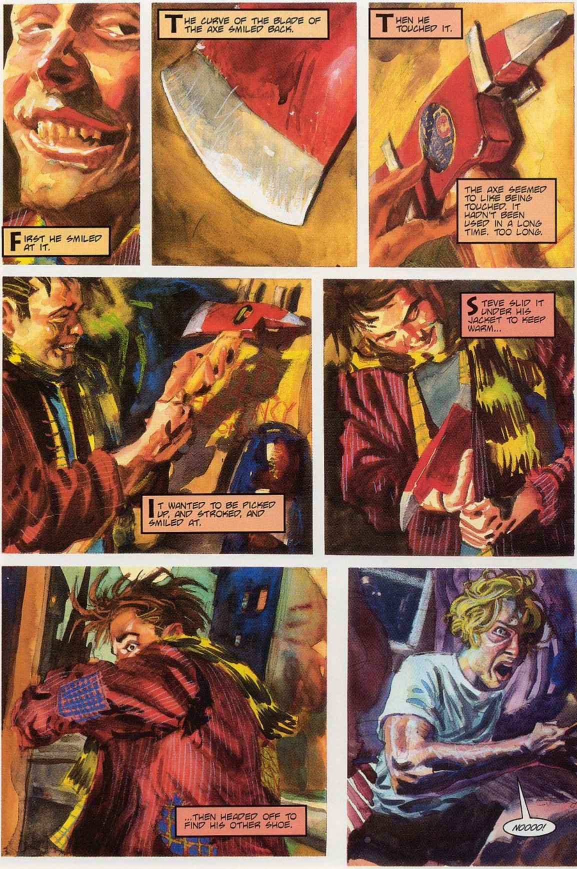

HEE HEE HEE
HEE HEE HEE
HEE HEE HEE
HE'D NEVER DREAMT IT TWICE IN ONE NIGHT BEFORE.

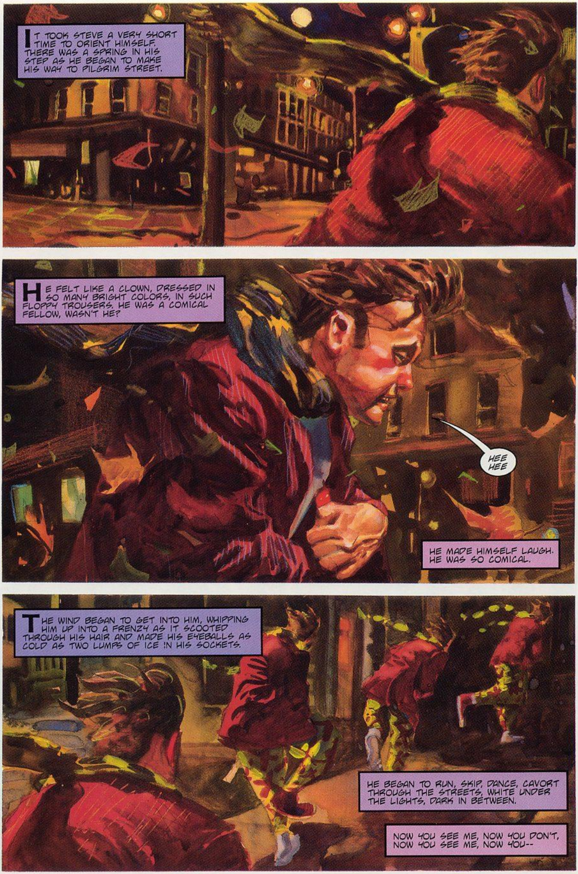

FUCK YOU! PIGLET BOY!
IT WAS THE LAST TIME OLD MAN CROWLEY WOULD BE LET IN. HE ALWAYS INVITED VIOLENCE. THIS HAD ALL THE MARKS OF A NEAR-RIOT; IT WOULD TAKE HOURS FOR THE WARDERS TO SETTLE THINGS DOWN AGAIN.

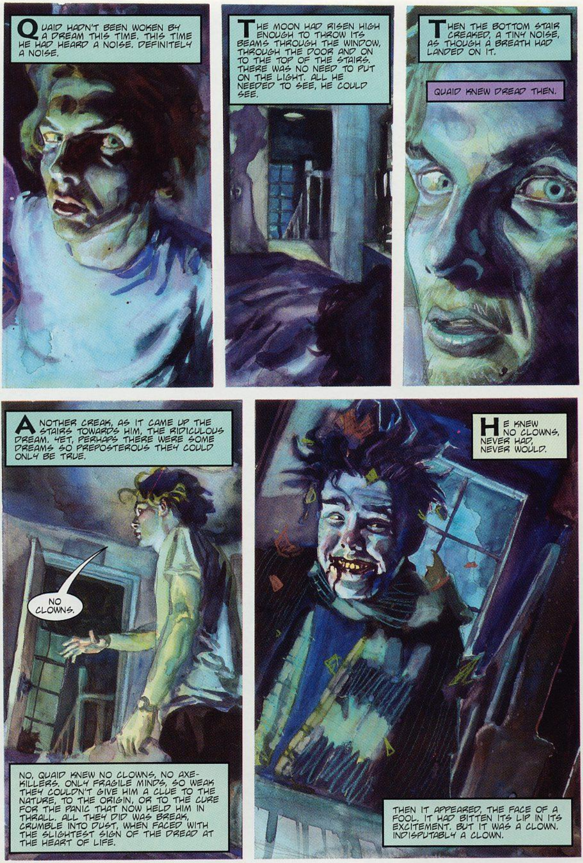

NOBODY QUESTIONED STEVE AS HE WANDERED AWAY.

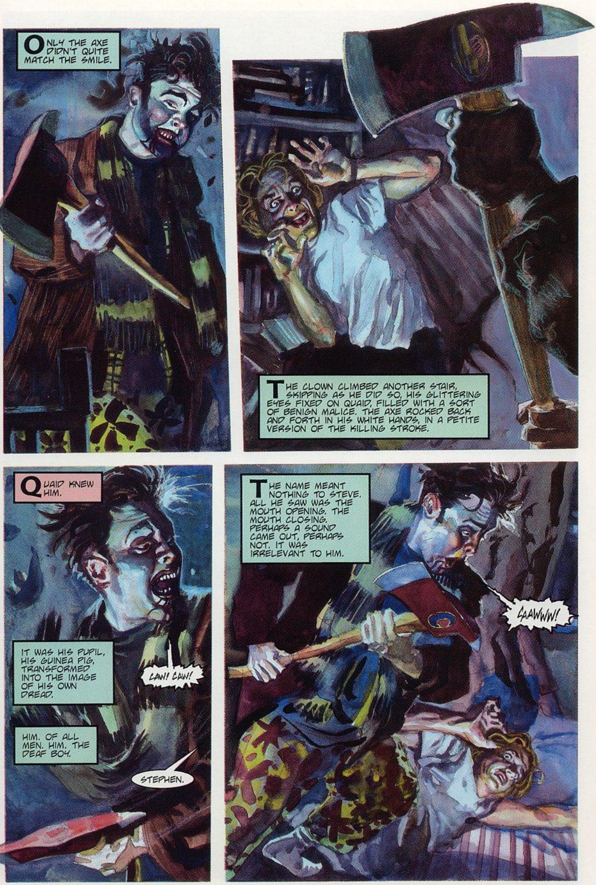

A LITTLE DISTANCE AWAY HE HEARD RUNNING FEET, SHOUTS, A WHISTLE.
FOR EMERGENCY USE ONLY
EMERG

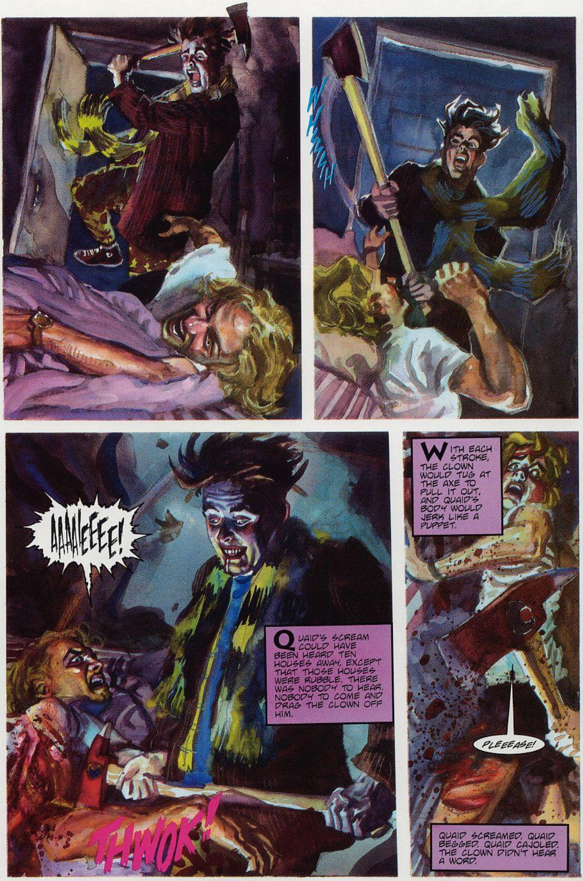

R
GENCY
ONLY
BUT NOBODY CAME TO INTERRUPT STEVE, AS HE MADE FRIENDS WITH THE AXE.

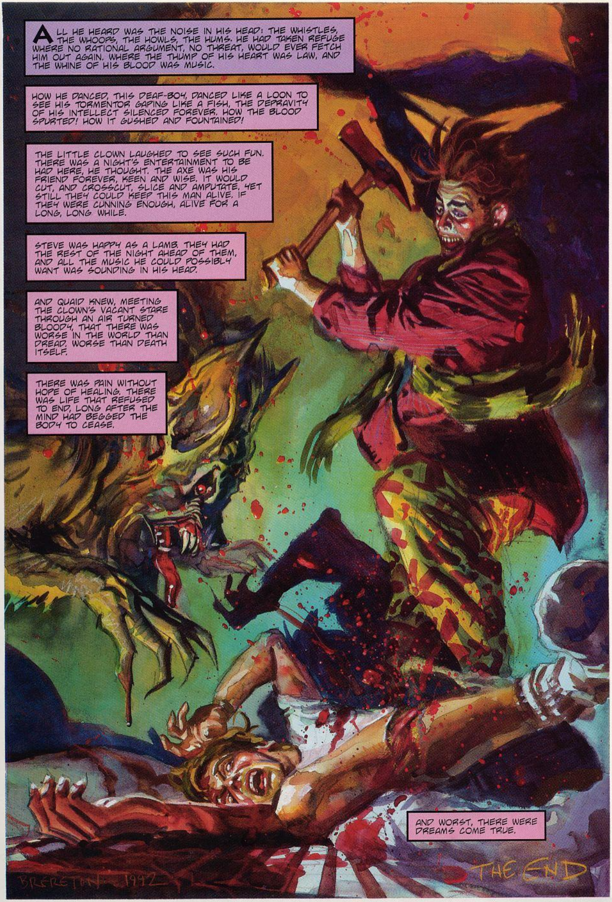

FIRST HE SMILED AT IT.
THE CURVE OF THE BLADE OF THE AXE SMILED BACK.
THEN HE TOUCHED IT.
THE AXE SEEMED TO LIKE BEING TOUCHED. IT HADN'T BEEN USED IN A LONG TIME. TOO LONG.
IT WANTED TO BE PICKED UP, AND STROKED, AND SMILED AT.
STEVE SLID IT UNDER HIS JACKET TO KEEP WARM...
...THEN HEADED OFF TO FIND HIS OTHER SHOE.
NOOOO!


IT TOOK STEVE A VERY SHORT TIME TO ORIENT HIMSELF. THERE WAS A SPRING IN HIS STEP AS HE BEGAN TO MAKE HIS WAY TO PILGRIM STREET.
HE FELT LIKE A CLOWN, DRESSED IN SO MANY BRIGHT COLORS, IN SUCH FLOPPY TROUSERS. HE WAS A COMICAL FELLOW, WASN'T HE?
HEE HEE
HE MADE HIMSELF LAUGH. HE WAS SO COMICAL.
THE WIND BEGAN TO GET INTO HIM, WHIPPING HIM UP INTO A FRENZY AS IT SCOOTED THROUGH HIS HAIR AND MADE HIS EYEBALLS AS COLD AS TWO LUMPS OF ICE IN HIS SOCKETS.
HE BEGAN TO RUN, SKIP, DANCE, CAVORT THROUGH THE STREETS, WHITE UNDER THE LIGHTS, DARK IN BETWEEN.
NOW YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU DON'T, NOW YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU--


QUAID HADN'T BEEN WOKEN BY A DREAM THIS TIME. THIS TIME HE HAD HEARD A NOISE. DEFINITELY A NOISE.
THE MOON HAD RISEN HIGH ENOUGH TO THROW ITS BEAMS THROUGH THE WINDOW, THROUGH THE DOOR AND ON TO THE TOP OF THE STAIRS. THERE WAS NO NEED TO PUT ON THE LIGHT. ALL HE NEEDED TO SEE, HE COULD SEE.
THEN THE BOTTOM STAIR CREAKED, A TINY NOISE, AS THOUGH A BREATH HAD LANDED ON IT.
QUAID KNEW DREAD THEN.
ANOTHER CREAK, AS IT CAME UP THE STAIRS TOWARDS HIM, THE RIDICULOUS DREAM. YET, PERHAPS THERE WERE SOME DREAMS SO PREPOSTEROUS THEY COULD ONLY BE TRUE.
NO CLOWNS.
NO, QUAID KNEW NO CLOWNS, NO AXE-KILLERS. ONLY FRAGILE MINDS, SO WEAK THEY COULDN'T GIVE HIM A CLUE TO THE NATURE, TO THE ORIGIN, OR TO THE CURE FOR THE PANIC THAT NOW HELD HIM IN THRALL. ALL THEY DID WAS BREAK, CRUMBLE INTO DUST, WHEN FACED WITH THE SLIGHTEST SIGN OF THE DREAD AT THE HEART OF LIFE.
HE KNEW NO CLOWNS, NEVER HAD, NEVER WOULD.
THEN IT APPEARED, THE FACE OF A FOOL. IT HAD BITTEN ITS LIP IN ITS EXCITEMENT. BUT IT WAS A CLOWN. INDISPUTABLY A CLOWN.


ONLY THE AXE DIDN'T QUITE MATCH THE SMILE.
THE CLOWN CLIMBED ANOTHER STAIR, SKIPPING AS HE DID SO, HIS GLITTERING EYES FIXED ON QUAID, FILLED WITH A SORT OF BENIGN MALICE. THE AXE ROCKED BACK AND FORTH IN HIS WHITE HANDS, IN A PETITE VERSION OF THE KILLING STROKE.
QUAID KNEW HIM.
IT WAS HIS PUPIL, HIS GUINEA PIG, TRANSFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF HIS OWN DREAD.
CAW! CAW!
HIM. OF ALL MEN. HIM. THE DEAF BOY.
STEPHEN.
THE NAME MEANT NOTHING TO STEVE. ALL HE SAW WAS THE MOUTH OPENING. THE MOUTH CLOSING. PERHAPS A SOUND CAME OUT, PERHAPS NOT. IT WAS IRRELEVANT TO HIM.
CAAWWW!


WHMMH
AAAAIEEEE!
QUAID'S SCREAM COULD HAVE BEEN HEARD TEN HOUSES AWAY, EXCEPT THAT THOSE HOUSES WERE RUBBLE. THERE WAS NOBODY TO HEAR, NOBODY TO COME AND DRAG THE CLOWN OFF HIM.
THWOK!
WITH EACH STROKE, THE CLOWN WOULD TUG AT THE AXE TO PULL IT OUT, AND QUAID'S BODY WOULD JERK LIKE A PUPPET.
PLEEEASE!
QUAID SCREAMED. QUAID BEGGED. QUAID CAJOLED. THE CLOWN DIDN'T HEAR A WORD.


ALL HE HEARD WAS THE NOISE IN HIS HEAD: THE WHISTLES, THE WHOOPS, THE HOWLS, THE HUMS. HE HAD TAKEN REFUGE WHERE NO RATIONAL ARGUMENT, NO THREAT, WOULD EVER FETCH HIM OUT AGAIN. WHERE THE THUMP OF HIS HEART WAS LAW, AND THE WHINE OF HIS BLOOD WAS MUSIC.
HOW HE DANCED, THIS DEAF-BOY, DANCED LIKE A LOON TO SEE HIS TORMENTOR GAPING LIKE A FISH, THE DEPRAVITY OF HIS INTELLECT SILENCED FOREVER. HOW THE BLOOD SPURTED! HOW IT GUSHED AND FOUNTAINED!
THE LITTLE CLOWN LAUGHED TO SEE SUCH FUN. THERE WAS A NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT TO BE HAD HERE, HE THOUGHT. THE AXE WAS HIS FRIEND FOREVER, KEEN AND WISE. IT WOULD CUT, AND CROSSCUT, SLICE AND AMPUTATE. YET STILL THEY COULD KEEP THIS MAN ALIVE. IF THEY WERE CUNNING ENOUGH, ALIVE FOR A LONG, LONG WHILE.
STEVE WAS HAPPY AS A LAMB. THEY HAD THE REST OF THE NIGHT AHEAD OF THEM, AND ALL THE MUSIC HE COULD POSSIBLY WANT WAS SOUNDING IN HIS HEAD.
AND QUAID KNEW, MEETING THE CLOWN'S VACANT STARE THROUGH AN AIR TURNED BLOODY, THAT THERE WAS WORSE IN THE WORLD THAN DREAD, WORSE THAN DEATH ITSELF.
THERE WAS PAIN WITHOUT HOPE OF HEALING. THERE WAS LIFE THAT REFUSED TO END, LONG AFTER THE MIND HAD BEGGED THE BODY TO CEASE.
AND WORST, THERE WERE DREAMS COME TRUE.
BRERETON 1992
THE END

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•

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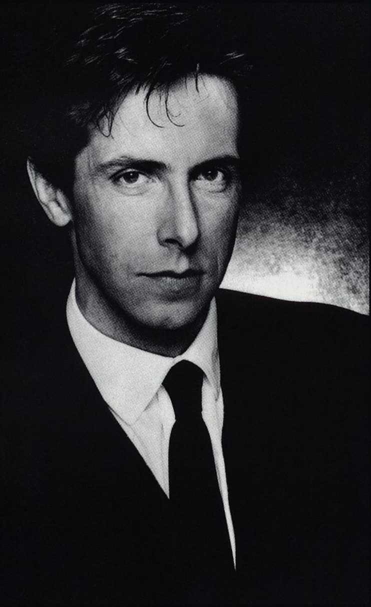
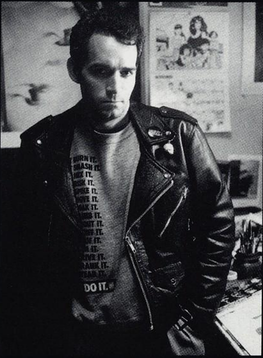
CLIVE BARKER

Clive Barker was born in 1952 in Liverpool, and now resides in Beverly Hills. Clive Barker's extraordinary stories have captivated millions of readers and filmgoers. With his short stories in the *Books of Blood* and such best-selling novels as *Weaveworld, Cabal, The Damnation Game, The Great and Secret Show,* and *Imajica*; in his spectacular films *Hellraiser, Hellbound,* and *Nightbreed*; and through the graphic novel adaptations of his stories and ideas in *Tapping the Vein, Son of Celluloid, Revelations, Hellraiser,* and *Nightbreed,* Barker has utilized all aspects of popular culture to create an indelible and unique vision of modern horror and fantasy. Two coffee table books about Barker—*Clive Barker, Illustrator,* which includes character designs for many of his films; and *Pandemonium,* which features a never-before-published play—offer insight into the mind of the acclaimed fantasist. Upcoming Barker stories to be illustrated by modern masters of sequential art include *Age of Desire, Life of Death, Rawhead Rex,* and *The Great and Secret Show.*



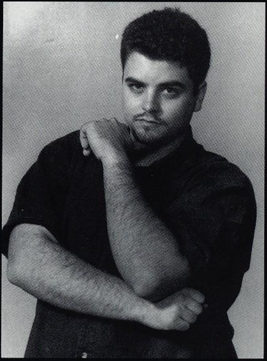


FRED BURKE

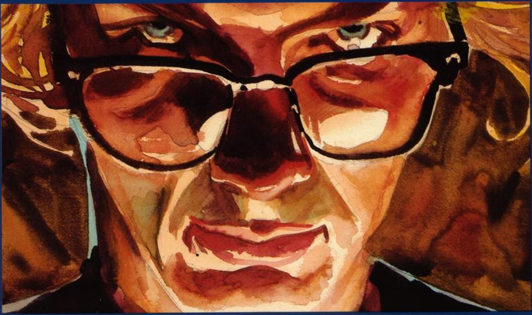
Fred Burke is the author of *Clive Barker, Illustrator*, a coffee table art book exploring Barker's paintings and drawings, and the editor of *Tapping the Vein*, the Eclipse graphic album adaptations of Barker's *Books of Blood*. Burke is currently scripting the comic book version of Barker's *The Great And Secret Show* as well as writing and designing *Clive Barker, Illustrator II*. Born in Austin, Texas, in 1965, Burke now lives in northern California, where his pursuits include astrology, caffeine addiction, *manga* translation, and volunteer work for San Francisco's Stop AIDS Project.

DAN BRERETON

Dan Brereton's first professional comics work, Eclipse's prestige format, fully painted *Black Terror* mini-series, won him the coveted Russ Manning Award for Promising Newcomer in 1990. He went on to paint *The Psycho* for DC, and ,since finishing *Dread*, has begun work with Walt Simonson on a prestige *World's Finest* mini-series. A San Francisco Bay Area native and avid collector of toys, Brereton and his family share their home with a pair of man-eating fish, two snakes, Lucifer and Polychrome, and an iguana named Cleo.



WHAT ARE YOU REALLY AFRAID OF?



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